

THE PRIORITY AND PRACTICE OF THEOCENTRIC PREACHING

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF

GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMES MERRILL ANDERSON

MARCH 8, 1997

THE PRIORITY AND PRACTICE OF THEOCENTRIC PREACHING:

..... Steps to Insure the Centrality of God and His Purposes

in the Interpretation and Preaching of the Bible

BY

JAMES MERRILL ANDERSON

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ONE -- IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM	1
TWO -- THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS	8
THREE -- FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW	37
FOUR -- THE COURSE IN THEOCENTRIC PREACHING	81
FIVE -- GENERALIZATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY	116

## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM

#### INTRODUCTION

"Let God be God!" That charge is dripping with, no, it is soaking in irony. After all, who can prevent God from being who He is determined to be? The Lord God is the sovereign Creator, we are His subjects and creatures. But if the question is framed, "Can we preachers portray Him as someone other than He is?", suddenly it is seen that what is certainly inadvisable is not entirely impossible. Preachers face pressures both subtle and sinister. The congregation reflects the diversity of a grocery store magazine rack. The cable company competes for their attention. Preachers may unintentionally misrepresent God's nature or misinterpret His revelation in their desperation to stay in touch with those whose fingers touch the remote control. If preaching is to succeed against both strong and subtle forces, it must discover how the sermon will truly "let God be God."

We live in a culture where information and images come to us through professional communicators backed by highly sophisticated electronic media. Men and women sitting in front of their television sets or listening to the radio expect to be entertained, excited, updated and informed -- all at the same time. On Sunday Mornings as preachers stand in pulpits and proclaim God's truth from the Scriptures to this media-saturated audience they face overwhelming obstacles.

There is a great difference between anchoring the news and preaching God's Word. A preacher called of God proclaims the Bible. The purpose of the proclamation is not simply to impart information. Instead, as Paul said to his young associate Timothy, it is

given that the people of God "may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" <sup>1</sup> A preacher not only wants the audience to hear the word, but to understand and to act on it.

## NEED FOR THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research project is part of a broader effort to enhance effectiveness in preaching for both the current and the next generation of preachers. Most professional Christian workers receive whatever training they have in communication during their Bible college or seminary years. Some do a competent job of preaching by using the tools they received in these institutions. Others are effective in their ministry because they have built on the principles they learned while students. Yet many seminary and Bible college graduates left feeling unprepared for the particular role of preacher. Research confirms this observation. Investigating how pastors feel about their formal training for the preaching task, Pelton sent questionnaires to over 300 pastors and received responses from 173. Eighty-three percent of the respondents have been in ministry six or more years (59% for 10 or more years and 23% for more than 20 years). Pelton discovered that nearly 40% of pastors struggle with relevance in their sermons. One in four admitted they have trouble identifying the "big idea" of the passage; a step essential to effective preaching.<sup>2</sup>

The study of the communication process reveals how difficult it is to effectively communicate any message in a complex, over-communicated society. Smith, based on his research, stated that, "Interchange between people always deals with differences, whether

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy 3:17

<sup>2</sup> Randy Pelton, unpublished research for Doctor of Ministry seminar (1994), 1-2

they are called personal differences or cultural differences. The variation between people may be small, or it may be so great that even talking together poses real difficulty. This is the central problem in communication: how to achieve understanding across differences, no matter what causes them."<sup>3</sup> The serious challenges to understanding require thoughtful and thorough solutions.

### PREPARATION FOR THIS STUDY

This study is related to a larger project designed to find effective ways to teach homiletics. It is part of a Doctor of Ministry program taught at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Forty-six pastors, all of whom had at least five years of preaching experience, concentrated for three years on the subject of preaching. They invested 240 hours in class, read a wide variety of literature in homiletics, communication and education. They also conducted research projects in their churches, specifically designed to determine what makes preaching effective. They met for three two-week seminars for intensive classroom and discussion experience focused on preaching. The broad purpose of these seminars was to prepare a band of teachers who could help others communicate the Scriptures effectively in their generation. Each participant in the seminars contributed to a total curriculum on the subject of preaching. Two editors with experience and training in communication and educational design integrated the work of those in the class into a comprehensive series of courses in the broad area of homiletics. The researchers believe that these courses may be used in Bible colleges, seminaries, seminars and other forums to help current and future ministers maximize their preaching skills.

---

<sup>3</sup> Donald K. Smith, *Creating Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 7.

## FOCUS OF THIS STUDY IN PARTICULAR

As a component of the larger project, this particular study will address "theocentric preaching". There is both a strong tendency and subtle temptation to use the Bible in a convenient and seemingly relevant way. That use, however, falls short of the author's purpose and distorts the sermonic focus. This pitfall is anthropocentric preaching. Such preaching grows from a faulty hermeneutic. The anthropocentric interpretation of Scripture misses the theocentric nature of God's revelation. Anthropocentric preaching is moralistic and frequently introduces Bible characters for the lessons that can supposedly be learned by their example. The flawed framework is further fed by the therapeutic paradigm that emphasizes peoples' psychological needs. The preacher may be easily inclined to address those "needs" by finding a helpful application that is somewhere short of the intended purpose of the biblical author. Under the pressure of a busy week or a needy flock, he can see something in a passage and say, "that'll preach". Many preachers have fallen for this pattern which is popularized by the notable-quotable preachers of radio and television.

The real need is for a theocentric focus to guide interpretation. Because the Bible is God's revelation of Himself and His works among His creation, it must first and foremost be a word about Him. The Bible is given to and a benefit for God's people. But this benefit is stunted if it is used primarily as a counseling manual or a church growth text.

The goal is to establish the validity and benefits and methods of maintaining a theocentric view of Scripture that is evidenced in biblical interpretation and preaching.

This project recognizes the need for a proper relationship between God-centered interpretation and human-centered application. This balance is maintained in the proper tension recognizing preachers receive a revelation from God that is at the same time relevant to contemporary listeners.

Many agree this is an important topic because the theocentric purpose of Scripture is essential to accurate interpretation and application. Furthermore, it is a perspective that is easily overlooked in the normal atomistic approach to studying and preaching the Bible passage by passage. Theocentric preaching requires a consideration of the intent of the author and the role of the canon.

The writer foresees this material being made available to pastoral peers who labor week by week in the study of the Word and the delivery of sermons. They, even more than those who are still students, will recognize the pressures in the ministry to find something that will be helpful and relevant to their congregations. The format may be a short course that consists of six or more classes addressing the problem and posing solutions. It could be offered in conjunction with a denominational conference, a gathering of local pastors over six successive sessions or incorporated into a pastors' study retreat. By design this study will provide tools that the preacher can use at his desk each week as he endeavors to prepare sermons which reflect the theocentric nature of God's revelation. This in-context training format was chosen so it might be accessible and valuable to those who earnestly desire to be faithful to God's Word and God's people. This study on theocentric preaching is intended to expose the local pastor to important issues that might not come to his attention otherwise.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is deemed important for four reasons.

First, many *teachers* of homiletics have had little specific training in the discipline. Often they are "drafted" from another department of the school and assigned the course. Many of these professors search for material to help them teach homiletics effectively. This may serve as a resource to them.

Second, *pastors* need to learn to preach effectively. A common way to refer to a minister is as a "preacher". A preacher who cannot preach, or who will not preach, fails at the core of his calling. As every pastor knows, the preparation and delivery of sermons takes a large portion of his time and thought. The pastor realizes that his ministry in the pulpit will enhance the ministry of the congregation. As a church increases in size, the minister depends more and more on his ability to preach. In order to influence his congregation he must be prepared to preach with skill, as well as with accuracy.

Third, *students* expect to learn to preach in their Bible college or seminary. A professional school makes a commitment to educate and train its students in a particular discipline. Those who prepare future ministers must recognize that this above all is an ethical commitment. Students expect to be taught not only how to understand the Bible, but also how to communicate it. This project will enable many schools to do a better job of teaching students to speak God's word effectively.

Fourth, the *church* needs skilled preachers. Those who take the Bible seriously, both in the pulpit and the pew, believe that the Scriptures are God's truth. It is a sin to bore people with the Bible or to give the impression to a congregation that the Scriptures

are irrelevant to life. Pastors who care about their congregations must know how to prepare sermons and deliver them.

The teaching of homiletics is vital to the preacher and the congregation. Where it is being done well, this project may help professors to do it better. Where it is being done poorly, the courses in this project may assist both the teacher and the learners in their task of understanding and applying the art and discipline of preaching.

As a pastor this writer joins the chorus that affirms the value of ongoing, in-context training. Not every pastor can invest the time required for another degree. But everyone can benefit from accessible and helpful seminars that are offered in a format that is both close and convenient. This particular project is designed to serve fellow-pastors who are currently engaged in ministry, yet who recognize the need for sharpening their skills and refreshing their minds. The high calling is to preach the Word of God in a way that honors God so that the preacher, as well as his listeners, will "let God be God!"

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

*Anthropocentric* describes a presentation that features man or woman as the focal point. It is evident hermeneutically by a concentration on the reactions, lessons and examples of biblical characters. This in turn is reflected homiletically in sermons that are man-centered in orientation, not just in application.

*Theocentric* refers to the interpretive approach to Scripture that focuses on God. It recognizes that God is the central figure of revelation and his redemptive work is the most significant activity recorded in the Bible.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

#### INTRODUCTION

Every preacher, among his study tools, should keep a hammer beside his open Bible. This is not to crack the "tough exegetical nuts", but to remind him he will soon, and very soon, be wielding the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> God has given much encouragement to press on in the labor of preaching. It is a task that seems to be, at one and the same time, audacious and arduous. Preachers may ask, "Who am I to declare with authority a message to information-saturated, entertainment-stimulated listeners? How can I clearly communicate a passage from a book that is by two, three or four millennia removed from my hearers?" Anyone who has ever licked Sunday's self-inflicted wounds on a Monday morning knows how preaching can appear to be an elusive art. Apart from self-pity, the heart that yearns to reach, to touch, his congregation will feel a noble pain. That pain is a gift. That burden is a blessing. This is a biblical and theological reflection for preachers, for all preachers need a reminder of the biblical and theological foundations as they labor in theocentric, or God-centered, preaching.<sup>2</sup>

#### THE SELF-REVEALING NATURE OF GOD

Moviegoers sitting in a dark theater would be left to their own imaginations unless the projectionist turned on the lamp. Even if the film were rolling it would remain opaque to the observer without illumination. Preachers are not left to their own interpretations in

---

<sup>1</sup> Jeremiah 23:29

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 119:103

order to make sense of life. God, who is light,<sup>3</sup> has revealed himself and his purposes.<sup>4</sup> His nature is to show himself to his creatures and this is first and foremost an act of his grace. Theologian Carl F. H. Henry stated that revelation is "a divinely initiated activity, God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality".<sup>5</sup> Although this revelation is refused by many who are proud and therefore God's self-revelation stays hidden from them,<sup>6</sup> it is to his delight and for others' benefit that God has deliberately disclosed himself. Not all remain in the dark, the illumination of God has shone forth. Therefore, the preacher has something to preach. As Mohler stated, "True preaching begins with this confession: we preach because God has spoken".<sup>7</sup>

The revelation of God is expressed in both deeds and words. The psalmist David announced, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands".<sup>8</sup> The magnificence of creation provides everyone with evidence and leaves no one with an excuse.<sup>9</sup> But God's great deeds extend beyond his initial creative work to include events like the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan and the dynasty of David; all of which display his redemptive work. Much has been said by many modern theologians about the meaning of these decisive, dynamic events which are granted greater veracity

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 1:5

<sup>4</sup> In this way John R. W. Stott begins to build the theological foundation for preaching. *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 92.

<sup>5</sup> Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, Vol. 2 (Waco: Word Books, 1976), 17.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:21

<sup>7</sup> R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Theology of Preaching", *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 19:1 NIV

<sup>9</sup> Romans 1:19,20

than the words of Scripture which accompany them. Greidanus identified this danger, "In some circles revelation is considered so dynamic that it is practically devoid of content and a new kind of mysticism results".<sup>10</sup> That oftentimes "actions do speak louder than words", it is noted also by Greidanus, who maintained, nevertheless, that, "The Bible, however, does not separate God's words from his deeds. God's words are his deeds in the sense that they accomplish his purposes".<sup>11</sup> There is no basis for isolating God's acts from his words

God has communicated with his people by deed and word, indeed deed with word. Tallies indicate that over 3800 times the Old Testament employs phrases such as, "the Lord said", "the Lord spoke", and "the word of the Lord came". The Bible demonstrates that God decided to speak and desired that speech to be recorded and preserved. Israel reveled in the revelation it received, in contrast to the dumb idols of their pagan neighbors.<sup>12</sup> God did not do "random acts of kindness" and leave his people to guess at their significance. Stott clarified, "It is important to add that the speech of God was related to his activity: he took the trouble to explain what he was doing".<sup>13</sup> In the case of Abraham, God spoke of a promised son long before he acted in fulfillment.<sup>14</sup> The word and the deed are, as this case shows, distinct, but inseparably related. Beleaguered readers might accuse the authors of redundancy as they plod their way through the Major

---

<sup>10</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970), 183.

<sup>11</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm 115:5

<sup>13</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 95.

<sup>14</sup> Edmund Clowney explains that Abraham believed when he had "received the word but not the event", a distinction on which the structure of promise in the covenant rests. *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 45.

Prophets. Let them be convinced, however, that though God is not verbose he is explicit to interpret his deeds.

Ultimate proof of God joining together word and deed is the Logos, the Christ, the Son of God, in whom the writer of Hebrews exulted, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word".<sup>15</sup> Not only did God disclose himself in his Son, but this Son, Jesus, also spoke, as the gospel writers give record. While the centrality of Christ in the preaching event will be dealt with later in this chapter, the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ provides confirmation that God wants to be known. Furthermore, he wants preachers to make him known.

The means by which men are to know God and make him known is the Scriptures. Defined as "God's Word written" in Article 20 of the Church of England's 39 Articles, the Scriptures go beyond the revelation of God's past acts with their contemporaneous verbal explanations. The Scriptures are a record, accurately preserved, of God's redemptive activity in history. He desired, as the Scriptures demonstrate, to not only be known by people of the past but by people of today. Stott concluded that only by committing his self-disclosure to writing "could God's particular revelation become universal, and what he did and said in Israel and in Christ be made available to all people in all ages and places"<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 1:1-3 NIV

<sup>16</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 98.

The nature of Scripture leads one to conclude that God has intentionally caused his revelation to be reliably recorded. How he chose to accomplish this is intriguing, indeed

## DIVINE REVELATION THROUGH HUMAN AUTHORSHIP

In a way that is illustrated by, but not identical to, the incarnation of Jesus, the Bible may also be seen as incarnational for it is the joint result of the divine and human. Greidanus elaborated, "The mystery of divine inspiration is that the Bible is 100% divine while it is 100% human -- a mystery which must not be resolved into a dualism which splits the Bible into divine elements and human elements, or divine factors and human factors, or divine aspects and human aspects".<sup>17</sup> There can be no profitable interpretation of the Scriptures if either element is disregarded. God certainly insured the recording of the message he authorized. But one must understand the role of the human author if he is to understand its message. God did not dictate his message, but through inspiration he spoke into the minds of men so that the result was the thoughts and word were completely and simultaneously theirs and his. As Stott explained, "On the one hand, the divine inspiration did not override the human authorship; on the other, the human authorship did not override the divine inspiration."<sup>18</sup>

The implications of this are immense. How can one account for the fact that four men, each writing under inspiration about the same Jesus, could produce such different, yet compatible books? The answer is found in seeing not only the hand of God in their work, but also the hand of man. By God's design each of these gospel authors, not to

---

<sup>17</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 104

<sup>18</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 97.

excluded other Scripture writers, was allowed to select, arrange, and combine the materials that would best serve the specific audience to whom he was writing while being true to facts. Stott pointed out, "It is also increasingly recognized that the New Testament authors were writing as theologians, each of whom selected and presented his material according to his particular theological purpose".<sup>19</sup> Greidanus asked, "And does it not completely misjudge the role of the Bible writer by viewing him as if he were some neutral reporter who merely recounts what happened?" Among these implications is one that serves the preacher very well. Greidanus adds, "Because the Word of God entered history and addressed specific people, it is by its very nature intensely relevant -- first of all to those people in the past, but no less so to us."<sup>20</sup> Relevance will be considered in depth in chapter three.

## THE NATURE OF SCRIPTURE DESCRIBED

The nature of Scripture invites three more considerations; power, preservation and proclamation. The power of the Word of God is anchored in the realization that God spoke the worlds into existence.<sup>21</sup> The Word of God is not just descriptive of his activities, it is in itself active.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, it has a guaranteed effect, "so is my word that goes out of my mouth; It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it".<sup>23</sup> The psalmist declared that, "The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. The voice of the

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>20</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 203, 206.

<sup>21</sup> Hebrews 11:3, Psalm 33:9

<sup>22</sup> Hebrews 4:12

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 55:11 NIV

LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon".<sup>24</sup> This convincing focus on the power of God's Word is helpful to offset the preacher's doubts over the effectiveness of his labors. He must realize the "results", though appearing meager, are not always visible, and the reason is by no means the insufficiency of the Word.<sup>25</sup> Combining pastoral and professorial insight Chapell wrote, "Ultimately preaching accomplishes its spiritual purposes not because of the skills of the preacher, but because of the power of the Scripture proclaimed." He continued, "Scripture's portrayal of its own potency challenges us always to remember that the Word preached rather than the *preaching* of the Word accomplishes heaven's purposes" <sup>26</sup> God's Word is powerful, like a hammer. The power, of course, resides not in the pages but in the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit of God who empowered the "prototype" of Christian preaching on the day of Pentecost.<sup>27</sup>

The preserved nature of God's Word in the Bible has already been introduced under the topic of revelation. All Scripture being God-breathed or inspired by the Spirit of God is sure to be useful.<sup>28</sup> The Word of God is both living and enduring.<sup>29</sup> Because it emanates from God, the Scripture bears his eternal nature.<sup>30</sup> The nature of God not only insures Scripture's usefulness, but also its truthfulness. Mohler applied this to preachers , "The authority of the preacher is intrinsically rooted in the authority of the Bible as the church's Book and the unblemished Word of God. Its total truthfulness is a witness to

---

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 29:4,5 NIV

<sup>25</sup> Isaiah 49:4

<sup>26</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 18,19.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 1:8

<sup>28</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16,17, see also 2 Peter 1:21

<sup>29</sup> 1 Peter 1:23

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 40:8

God's own holiness".<sup>31</sup> For the church this issue of preservation is connected with the canon, the determined books of inspiration to which the church submits. Arguing for a theological interpretation of Scripture, Greidanus stated, "the Bible requires a theological interpretation not only because it is the Word of God but also because it is the authoritative word *about* God".<sup>32</sup> Because the canon is closed, the definitive word about God is defined by the Word of God, the Bible. The preacher can therefore preach with confidence because God has preserved for him a Word that is trustworthy, accurate, relevant, useful, infallible, enduring and inerrant

The final term describing the nature of Scripture is full of import for the preacher. This Word that has come from God is proclamation. Scripture is kerygma, it is appeal, address, the message of a herald. The Bible is not mere facts, though it is factual. It is not mere history, though it is historical. Scripture isn't just used for preaching, it is preaching

"Preaching", according to Packer, "mediates not only God's authority, but also His *presence* and His *power*. Preaching effects an encounter not simply with truth, but with God Himself."<sup>33</sup> Stott explained, "Scripture is far more than a collection of ancient documents in which the words of God are preserved. . . . On the contrary, it is a living word to living people from the living God, a contemporary message for the contemporary world."<sup>34</sup> Packer continued, "Holy Scripture is, in and of itself, preaching. . . . The Bible text is the real preacher, and the role of the man in the pulpit or the counseling conversation is simply to let the passages say their piece through him" <sup>35</sup> Piling one rich

---

<sup>31</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 15.

<sup>32</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 105.

<sup>33</sup> J.I. Packer, "Why Preach?", *The Preacher and Preaching*, ed. Samuel Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986), 13.

<sup>34</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 100.

explanation upon another, one may look to Packer again, who this time quotes Gustav Wingren, "Preaching is not just talk about a Christ of the past, but is a mouth through which the Christ of the present offers us life today".<sup>36</sup> One more witness to this incredible phenomenon; that the Bible was originally and is continually preaching, was Sidney Greidanus: "The Bible is unique and indispensable for preaching because it provides the definitive *interpretation* of God's acts in history; the Bible is the source for contemporary preaching because it alone provides normative *proclamation* of God's acts of redemption and the response he requires. The Bible itself, therefore can be seen as preaching authoritative proclamation for future generations of God's good news of salvation"<sup>37</sup>

In summary, the Bible is unique; it is the Word of God that he has graciously given so that we can know him. Although it was given in the past to particular authors who were allowed to influence its expression to serve their specific audiences, this Word did and does possess the life-giving, enduring nature of God, himself. In its original delivery, this Word was designed to preach. The preacher who rightly handles this Word of truth today, has in his hands the reliable, safe-guarded, relevant message from God for the church.<sup>38</sup>

## THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING THE SCRIPTURE

With feet firmly planted on the biblical ground of revelation and the nature of Scripture preachers are prepared to consider preaching. Moreover they are in a position to

---

<sup>35</sup> Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 17.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>37</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 13

<sup>38</sup> 2 Timothy 2:15

teach others the value of preaching. In simplest terms, God has given permission to preach. Simplest because God's prerogative includes his commission even as it requires the preacher's submission. Paul charged Timothy, "Preach the Word".<sup>39</sup> Paul confronted himself, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!".<sup>40</sup> So, whether preachers be reticent or insistent, they are all called to take up the glorious task of preaching.

Anyone who holds a high view of preaching today will be bombarded by distractions and discouragements. Communication theory and media practice pan the 30-minute monologue. A "talking head" is synonymous with a dull, if not dead, communicator. Sound bites and multi-media presentations make pale the verbal one-dimensional path of the preacher. The intimacy and community of small groups are offered as further fodder indicting the less personal approach of preaching. Alas, one asks, "Is preaching passé?"

Shoring up an eroding confidence would well begin with God's commission. How did God intend to manifest his redemptive purposes? It is evident in the New Testament, by precept and by practice that preaching was his chosen plan. Mohler substantiated this by saying, "The church does not preach because preaching is thought to be a good idea or an effective technique. A theology of preaching begins with the humble acknowledgement that preaching is not a human invention but a gracious creation of God and a central part of His revealed will for the church".<sup>41</sup>

Preaching is God's plan for heralding the gospel and feeding his flock in any age.

---

<sup>39</sup> 2 Timothy 4:2 NIV

<sup>40</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:16 NIV

<sup>41</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 13.

God did not instigate a method that would become obsolete. That is not to say preaching doesn't have its detractors, but a look into the New Testament will reveal their presence was introduced not in the twentieth century, but in the first.<sup>42</sup> Responding to suspicion that the pulpit monologue is an inefficient way of communicating and that books, films, TV, tapes and group study can be fully acceptable substitutes, Packer said, "But preaching is more than what is nowadays thought of as communication. God uses preaching to communicate more than current communication theory is concerned with, and more than alternative forms of Christian communication can be expected under ordinary circumstances to convey".<sup>43</sup> Preaching is communication, but more than mere communication. It is more than talking about God, indeed it is by design talking *for* God

Two helpful terms underscore the nature of the preacher's commission. The word "herald" identifies the preacher as messenger or proclaimer of the divine word.<sup>44</sup> This role is associated with the kerygma; the proclaimed message of salvation. Another useful picture of the preacher's commission is as "steward", faithfully guarding and dispensing the Word.<sup>45</sup> "The true preacher", counseled Stott, "is both a faithful steward of God's mysteries and a fervent herald of God's good news".<sup>46</sup> To grasp the position of the preacher is to gasp at the privilege. Thoughtful preachers and teachers of preaching fully comprehend this. Chapell anticipated our reaction, "Elevating preaching to such a lofty pedestal can intimidate even the most committed student of Scripture. Probably no conscientious preacher has failed to question whether the task is greater than the

---

<sup>42</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:17,23; 2:3,4

<sup>43</sup> Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 15.

<sup>44</sup> 2 Timothy 1:11

<sup>45</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:1,2

<sup>46</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 100

servant".<sup>47</sup> Do not despair, for even the prolific and productive preacher, Paul concluded, "And who is equal to such a task?"<sup>48</sup> Perhaps that is the right perspective to start with, but Paul's pattern would move us on to confidence, because the God who calls us is competent; "Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God."<sup>49</sup>

Engaging the task of Christian preaching is not easy, those who do so must feel the compulsion of God's commission to bear the weight of heavy duty. Martin Luther confessed, "If I could come down with a good conscience, I would rather be stretched out on a wheel and carry stones than preach one sermon." As Mohler reminded us, "Speaking on the basis of what God has spoken is both arduous and glorious."<sup>50</sup>

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF PREACHER TO SCRIPTURE

If God had not spoken preachers would have nothing at all to say. When they speak other than what God has spoken, preachers say nothing at all. But the preacher of God's Word speaks and God speaks through him. Again, Mohler articulated this incredible relationship when he said, "In preaching, finite, frail, and fault-ridden human beings bear bold witness to the infinite, all-powerful, and perfect Lord. Such an endeavor would smack of unmitigated arrogance and over-reaching were it not for the fact that God Himself has set us to the task. In this light, preaching is not an act of arrogance but of

---

<sup>47</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 17

<sup>48</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:16 NIV

<sup>49</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:4,5 NIV

<sup>50</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 15. This is the source for both his statement and the quote of Luther.

humility".<sup>51</sup> To insure that he speaks for God the crucial posture for the preacher must be standing in submission to the text of Scripture. The Bible is not only his authoritative source, it is to be his authority. Greidanus added, "Since the Bible is the normative source of revelation for contemporary preachers, they must bind themselves to the Scriptures if they would preach the word of God".<sup>52</sup> Modern preachers are dependent upon the text. The revelation is complete, the canon is closed. "Today's preachers are neither prophets nor apostles", explained Stott, "for we are not recipients of any fresh, direct revelation. The Word of the Lord does not come to us as it came to them; rather we have to come to it".<sup>53</sup> Preachers have in their hands the complete written word from God. It is from this platform alone that preaching possesses legitimate authority. Sermons must be biblical. Greidanus noted, "To preach the word today means, therefore, to pass on to the church here and now the message of the Bible. The call to preach the word is a call to preach biblically".<sup>54</sup>

Preachers can be assured of preaching biblically by expository preaching. Expository preaching is not merely a technique suiting the preferences of academic, exegetical types. Expository refers to the content of the sermon rather than its style. Expository is not new nomenclature for verse by verse explanation of a text. To exposit or expound a passage is to bring out what is in the text. According to Haddon Robinson, "Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context,

---

<sup>51</sup> ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 9

<sup>53</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 113.

<sup>54</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 10.

which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers".<sup>55</sup> From this elaborate definition one may excerpt first, "the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository message".<sup>56</sup>

The opposite of exposition is imposition; putting on the text what is not in the text. This happens when the preacher brings a preconceived notion or a premeditated need to the passage and it is inverted to serve his predetermined purpose. The tragedy of this "bait and switch" style of sermon, is that it becomes disconnected from the author of the text, both human and divine, and thereby is divested of any authority or power. Neither is preaching to be an exercise in fanciful speculation. "Preaching", Mohler affirmed, "does not consist of speculation but of exposition".<sup>57</sup> God, who has made himself and his saving acts known, has given something to talk about! On the positive side of the ledger, expository preaching, as Chapell pointed out, presents the power of the Word and the authority of the Word.<sup>58</sup> Who would want to preach his own words once he understands the dynamic power of God's Word? Benefits abound to those who discipline themselves to allow the Scriptures to speak. It is not easy to expound the Scriptures, but it is rewarding, both to the preacher and his congregation. Greidanus concluded, "At heart, expository preaching is not just a method but a commitment, a view of the essence of preaching, a homiletical approach to preach the Scriptures".<sup>59</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 20.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 14.

<sup>58</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 15.

## THE NATURE OF AUTHORITY IN PREACHING

Any discussion on preaching the Scriptures must consider the issue of authority. But introducing the subject of authority before this point would be premature. A brief review of the ground covered will confirm this. This chapter began by recognizing the reality that God had revealed himself in deed and word. To preserve that revelation God instructed and inspired men to record the deeds and the words explaining his mighty acts. From this gracious intention it was concluded that the Scriptures are his reliable record given to insure that his saving acts would be understood and thereby be of benefit today. These realities have a significant bearing on preachers. These servants whom God has commissioned to speak his written Word are charged with the "arduous and glorious" task of making God and his purposes known. This is accomplished by the careful, faithful use of his Word, best described as expository preaching. It is as stewards that preachers are well aware that they are to be in submission to Scriptures. Amazingly, however, it is in this and only this posture, that preachers inherit an authority that is far beyond anything of their own creation. Like Paul, modern preachers speak, "like men sent from God" <sup>60</sup>

History tells of a time when the preacher's authority was assumed. Packer related how a century and more ago the common question to someone returning from a church service concerned how they "got on" under the momentous divine influence of the preaching of the Word. No longer, for now the question has been turned to discern how the preacher "got on" in his pulpit performance.<sup>61</sup> Only the naive preacher is ignorant of the anti-authority bias at-large in contemporary culture, and let loose against many in the

---

<sup>60</sup> 2 Corinthians 2:17

<sup>61</sup> Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 5.

ministry. Wise is the preacher who realizes any pomposity is sure to be spurned. But pity the poor preacher who languishes in a limp pulpit because he lacks the certainty that his message is still alive with divine authority.

A holy boldness is reserved for those who will preach the Word, for those who assert, "the meaning of the passage is the message of the sermon".<sup>62</sup> For expository preachers the matter of authority is removed from the arenas of humility and hubris. It is anchored in the text which is the source of the sermon. Because the preacher has, himself, submitted to the Word of God, he can expect the same proper posture of his listeners. His authority is derived from the Scriptures and as long as he faithfully preaches the Scriptures he may rightfully experience confidence in the task of preaching. But they must be bound to the Bible, as Greidanus maintained, "if preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must proclaim the message of the inspired Scriptures, for the Scriptures alone are the word of God written; the Scriptures alone have divine authority. If preachers wish to preach with divine authority, they must submit themselves, their thoughts and opinions, to the Scriptures and echo the word of God".<sup>63</sup> One more voice on this critical subject is heard from Clowney, "The authority of preaching is not heightened but lost if the preacher forsakes his place behind the Book".<sup>64</sup>

In an age infatuated with celebrity and fraught with comparison, it bears saying explicitly that the authority of the preacher is not a matter of machismo, panache, charisma or any other human trait. In the sub-culture of evangelicalism the same strains appear so one must be clear that authority is not enhanced by strength of personality. Personality is,

---

<sup>62</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 23.

<sup>63</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 12,13

<sup>64</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 61

however, a very present element in the preaching event. In the last century, long before the cultural symptoms mentioned had emerged, Phillips Brooks defined preaching as "truth through personality". Because the Word preached is living the preached Word is itself a redemptive event, even today.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, it is also an incarnational event bearing real power.<sup>66</sup> Packer continued to explain why "live" preaching is still the preferred expression for preaching, despite the advent of technology providing "canned, staged or embalmed" preaching. He claimed, "The committed personality is in this sense integral to God's message, for God uses it to communicate his own reality as his messenger speaks. Thus the need for preaching "live" remains as great as it was nineteen centuries ago. It is still supremely through preaching, that is, through the impact on us of the message and the messenger together, that God meets us, and makes Himself and His saving grace known to us".<sup>67</sup> Let the preacher tempted to abdicate to the celebrity preacher (be he canned, staged or embalmed) take heart for God intends to express himself through each one. Preachers of integrity proclaim the relevancy of Scripture by their word and life.<sup>68</sup>

### THREE CHARACTERISTICS OF PREACHING

Preaching may be considered in three more dimensions briefly, worship, theology and nurture. White declared, "The gospel *is* the power of God unto salvation--not about the power of God, or an offer of the power of God, but itself a living, pulsating, energy of God, a word that works". This, said White, is the conviction that lies behind the place of

---

<sup>65</sup> Greidanus, "But if God speaks through contemporary preachers, then this word of God is also God's deed today, a redemptive event.", *The Modern Preacher*, 9.

<sup>66</sup> Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 16.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 16,17.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 17.

preaching in Christian worship; it is God's Word spoken which demands to be heard and heeded.<sup>69</sup> It goes without saying, if sometimes not without apology, that preaching happens most often in the context of the worship service. With much emphasis on music, testimony and even drama, preaching can appear to be one of several interchangeable parts in the order of service. But as Packer maintained, "The preaching of the Bible is the mainspring of this worship" and, "preaching should be regarded as the climax of congregational worship". Preaching fuels devotional fire, and it occasions honoring God by reverently listening to His Word with a full purpose of praising and obeying Him.<sup>70</sup> The ultimate purpose of the sermon, Mohler announced, "is to glorify God and to reveal a glimpse of His glory to His creation".<sup>71</sup>

With candidness and passion Pitt-Watson speaks of the integral relationship between preaching and theology when he relayed, "Preaching is the heart and soul of theology. Theology is the conscience of preaching".<sup>72</sup> He identified the tendency of his fellow-preachers saying, "rather than become uninteresting we become untheological".<sup>73</sup> The prevalence of that tendency is the rationale of this thesis. As chapter one identifies the problem, the solution to follow lies in a theologically informed hermeneutic and homiletic. For now, it can be stated that a theological interpretation is just as valid and needed in the preaching process as the historical, grammatical and literary interpretation.<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> R.E.O. White, *A Guide to Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 9,10.

<sup>70</sup> Packer, *The Preacher and Preaching*, 20.

<sup>71</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Ian Pitt-Watson, *Preaching: A Kind of Folly* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 35.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>74</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 102.

Ever since Jesus told Peter, "Feed my sheep",<sup>75</sup> pastors have understood their role as preachers to include the edification and feeding of the congregation. Stott clarified, "To feed the flock is, of course, a metaphorical expression for teaching the Church. So the pastor is essentially a teacher."<sup>76</sup> God has given, among many spiritual gifts to the church, pastor-teachers.<sup>77</sup> John Calvin comments of this verse, "We see how God, who could in a moment perfect his own, nevertheless desires them to grow up into manhood solely under the education of the Church. We see the way set for it: the preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the pastors".<sup>78</sup> Preaching is God's provision for His flock. John Chrysostom, considered the greatest preacher of the fourth century, commented on the preacher's task of feeding the flock; "Now my preaching is addressed to all and provides a remedy in common for those who need one, but it is the duty of each one of my listeners to take what is suited for his affliction. I do not know who are the sick, who are the healthy. Therefore I discuss subjects of every sort and suited to every ill."<sup>79</sup>

## THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN PREACHING

Preaching is founded on the self-revelation of God. Furthermore, it is focused on the saving work of Christ. Any study on the biblical and theological understanding of preaching must also include the role of God, the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit was responsible for the inspiration of the Scriptures<sup>80</sup> and the Spirit is responsible for the

---

<sup>75</sup> John 21:17 NIV

<sup>76</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 118.

<sup>77</sup> Ephesians 4:11

<sup>78</sup> As cited in Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 119.

<sup>79</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1957), 222-223.

<sup>80</sup> 2 Peter 1:21

illumination of the Scriptures<sup>81</sup> it is evident that he "closes the loop" in the preaching task. Mohler made this helpful differentiation, "The preacher stands before the congregation as the external minister of the Word, but the Holy Spirit works as the internal minister of that same Word".<sup>82</sup> From the study to the pew, both preacher and hearer are dependent upon the Spirit's illuminating work for any understanding of the biblical text. The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit.<sup>83</sup> Chapell offered great encouragement to preachers saying, "When we present the light of God's Word, his Spirit performs God's purposes of warning, melting and conforming hearts to his will".<sup>84</sup> As preachers acknowledge the Holy Spirit's role, they recognize their total dependence upon him and find further incentive to pray and live as pleasing vessels that invite his filling.

The role of the Holy Spirit accounts for another common phenomenon. What preacher hasn't had someone compliment a sermon for a blessing gained that was beyond what he remembers saying? Pitt-Watson captured this curiosity, "When God speaks through the preacher, what is said is never adequate to express what is meant. But what is heard is often more than what is said".<sup>85</sup> These incidents may be mildly amusing, but the role of the Holy Spirit in the labor of preaching is anything but mild. His role is to powerfully testify to the Son of God and his redeeming work.<sup>86</sup> Without the Holy Spirit people would remain "clueless" as to God's provision for their salvation.<sup>87</sup> Thanks be to God who has not withheld his Spirit!

---

<sup>81</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

<sup>82</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 18.

<sup>83</sup> Ephesians 6:17

<sup>84</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 24.

<sup>85</sup> Pitt-Watson, *Preaching: A Kind of Folly*, 21.

<sup>86</sup> John 15:26; Ephesians 1:17

<sup>87</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:14

## THE THEOCENTRIC FOCUS OF SCRIPTURE AND PREACHING

Everywhere within the Bible we see the initiative of God. Indeed, the Scriptures themselves bear witness to the self-disclosure of God who in an act of holy graciousness, gave up His comprehensive privacy that we might know Him.<sup>88</sup> This revelation employed some 40 authors, contracted over 1600 years, which God sovereignly orchestrated and administrated to capture the historic scope of his redemptive work through his Son, Jesus Christ. This plan of the triune God, this grandest of all endeavors was authored by the Father and accomplished by the Son and is applied by the Holy Spirit. This is the common denominator of the 66 canonical books of the Bible; written by Jews, and at least one Greek (Luke), incorporating several distinct genre, and transcribed in three languages. It is unapologetically about God! He is the focus of the revelation that has been received. God is the hero of every text.<sup>89</sup> His purposes eclipse all other sub-plots in the preacher's effort to interpret the Bible.

Because God is the source and center of Scripture, preachers must maintain a theocentric focus as they approach the Word both hermeneutically and homiletically. The implications for preaching will be explored below. But first a clarification is in order. To say that God is the center of the Bible is not a leap into esoteric space in theory nor abstract sermonizing in practice. Greidanus offered help here, "When one asks about the purpose of the canon, the thrust of the Bible as a whole, the answer seems quite obvious: the canon intends to tell us about God--not God in the abstract, but God in relationship to his creation and his people, God's actions in the world, God's coming kingdom."<sup>90</sup> The

---

<sup>88</sup> Mohler, *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, 14.

<sup>89</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 295.

<sup>90</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 113.

Bible is populated with people (2,930 at one count<sup>91</sup>), but the Scriptures are not primarily given to present these people as models or even examples. The biblical authors' primary interest is in God's actions in human events, not in the events themselves. As Greidanus concludes, "Thus the major clue we receive regarding God's purpose in the canon as a whole as well as in its individual passages is that God intends to tell us about *himself*: his person, his actions, his will, etc."<sup>92</sup> That God tells *us*; his people from Old and New Testament times to now, is encouraging and ennobling. People who were made in the image of God<sup>93</sup> and who are being conformed into the likeness of Christ<sup>94</sup> are the object of God's affections, but they are not the center of attention. The Bible, if it is to be interpreted accurately, according to the intention of its original authors, is to be regarded as God-centered. This does not mean that the people found in the biblical text should be ignored because it is through them that God's redemptive acts are known. Greidanus again offered an insight as to the validity of biblical characters while advocating for a theocentric viewpoint, "these people have been taken up into the scriptural narrative not for their own sake but for the sake of showing what God is doing for, in, and through them. Historical texts do not intend to give biographies of men but to proclaim the redemptive acts of God for man"<sup>95</sup>

By establishing the necessity of theological interpretation it is not implied that the preacher must impose some systematic theological grid over the passage he is studying. It

---

<sup>91</sup> Lloyd M. Perry, *Manual for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), 106.

<sup>92</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 113-114

<sup>93</sup> Genesis 1:26,27

<sup>94</sup> Romans 8:29

<sup>95</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 215.

is better described for this reason as "theocentric" interpretation because the concern is for a God-centered understanding of the Bible in general and the preaching text in particular. This important perspective translates into a step in the interpretive process that "seeks to probe beyond mere historical reconstruction and verbal meanings to a discernment of the message of God in the Scriptures; it concentrates on the prophetic, kerygmatic dimension and the theocentric focus".<sup>96</sup> Because "historical and grammatical" are typically the most frequently used adjectives preceding "interpretation", one must consciously include the "theological" or "theocentric" consideration as well. The failure to comprehend the theocentric viewpoint of a text too often results in an anthropocentric sermon, even when history and grammar are accurately understood.

Although theocentric interpretation is not synonymous with theology per se, it is served by theological knowledge. A convincing proponent for biblical theology, Clowney cited its advantages as recognizing "both the historical and progressive character of revelation and the unity of the divine counsel which it declares".<sup>97</sup> He further explained, "Biblical theology is a contradiction in terms unless the Bible presents a consistent message".<sup>98</sup> The Bible is not, despite its diverse characteristics, a piecemeal book. It may be described as a tapestry, not as a bundle of loose threads. Searching for an overarching term to describe this consistent message students and scholars have found useful the term, "Redemptive History".<sup>99</sup> It is useful for the purposes of this thesis as it reinforces the theocentric view.

---

<sup>96</sup> Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 103.

<sup>97</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 17.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>99</sup> John Piper provides a helpful, succinct overview of the Bible's redemptive history, displaying the unifying goal of God to glorify himself, specifically through his redemptive

## VIEWING SCRIPTURE FROM A REDEMPTIVE-HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In an earlier day redemptive history was strategically posited as a defense and a reaction to a-historical or anti-historical developments of dialectic theology.<sup>100</sup> This paper will focus on the distinctive hermeneutical and homiletical benefits of viewing the Bible from a redemptive-historical perspective. The problem statement presented in chapter one identified the homiletical distortion that results from an anthropocentric interpretation. By using the "personal history" of a biblical character in the sermon as an example or model, the preacher may overemphasize his or her role. This not only leads to moralistic messages, but also ignores the more significant movement of God in advancing his redemptive purposes. Moreover, it misdirects the spotlight of sermonic attention away from Christ. Too often the sermon settles for saying something that is considered more common-sense than Christocentric. Because the Scripture is "His story", its purpose will best be understood in terms of God's activity in relation to his creation. This is the basis for preaching that is God-centered or theocentric.

The first distinctive benefit of redemptive history is its view of history. The God who created time, entered history and Scripture records his activities. There is, therefore, little value in splitting up history into two parts; profane and sacred. History records God working toward his goal; he has invaded our profane or fallen history. "God realizes his plan of redemption of the horizontal plane of history."<sup>101</sup> He is Immanuel, God with us.<sup>102</sup>

---

activity. See Piper's *Desiring God* (Portland: Multnomah, 1986), 227-238.

<sup>100</sup> Greidanus describes this tension of the 1930's-40's in his *Sola Scriptura*, 32.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>102</sup> Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23

Redemptive history serves us in identifying a second quality of Scripture as it has been revealed; that being its unity. "The unifying structure of Scripture is the structure of redemptive history".<sup>103</sup> Predicated on God's sovereignty, the view of cohesive purpose in redemptive history assures coherence among many authors, eras and genre.<sup>104</sup> Another attribute derived from the same quality of the Scriptures is "organic" interpretation. This hermeneutical principle views the text in its connection with the totality of redemptive history.<sup>105</sup> What would be a fruitless exercise without unity in revelation becomes useful by avoiding a common pitfall; atomistic interpretation. Isolating the text from its context, small or large, portends misinterpretation. Clowney drew an important implication, "Because of the continuity of God's work in redemption, the connection between salvation in the Old Testament and the New is organic".<sup>106</sup> There is one saving Lord. He added, "We honor the Word of God when we recognize the principle of organic connection between promise and fulfillment".<sup>107</sup> This does not exhaust the benefit the preacher gains as he seeks to understand a particular passage. Greidanus explained, "Because the organic interpretation views the text in the context of the whole of Scripture, it shows even more clearly than the historical interpretation that the interpretation must be *theocentric*: God's acts proclaimed in the O.T. find their climax in God's acts proclaimed in the N.T."<sup>108</sup> A final benefit that may be elevated because of the unified nature of Scripture was noted by Stott, "The Reformers also spoke much of 'the analogy of faith', by which they meant their

---

<sup>103</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 74-75.

<sup>104</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 123.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>106</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 100.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>108</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 223.

belief that Scripture possesses a unity given it by the mind of God, that it must therefore be allowed to interpret itself, one passage throwing light upon another."<sup>109</sup> The corollary is also true; no exposition of Scripture is allowed that is contradicted elsewhere.

"The Bible does not contain many histories but *one* history--the one history of God's constantly advancing revelation, the one history of God's ever progressing redemptive work."<sup>110</sup>

The third and final observation about the nature of Scripture that is captured in the concept of redemptive-history is its "progressive" nature. It is no affront to God or our understanding of revelation to perceive in it development or progression, for progression need not imply improvement. Neither does progression undermine unity. "This progression should not be disconnected from the unity: it is a progression in unity and a unity in progression."<sup>111</sup> From Old Testament to the New Testament, God unfolds his saving plan. "This revelation was not given at one time, nor in the form of a theological dictionary. It was given progressively, for the process of revelation accompanies the process of redemption."<sup>112</sup> From the promise of the woman's victorious Offspring given to fallen Adam to the promise of blessing for all peoples through Abraham<sup>113</sup> and beyond, the invincible, inscrutable work of God's redemption advanced.

---

<sup>109</sup> Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 128.

<sup>110</sup> Greidanus quoting Holwerda in *Sola Scriptura*, 41.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>112</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 15.

<sup>113</sup> Genesis 3:15; Genesis 12:1-3.

## THE RELATIONSHIP OF THEOCENTRIC TO CHRISTOCENTRIC

It is crucial for the preacher to understand how his preaching text fits into the scope of redemptive history and how it may be affected by subsequent revelation.

Clowney warned, "The Christian proclamation of an Old Testament text is not the preaching of an Old Testament sermon".<sup>114</sup> Christ, is the unity of redemptive history. He is constantly present in the progress of this history. "The progression of redemptive history is not so much a progression to Christ (the Incarnation) as the progression of Christ."<sup>115</sup> Because Christ is the eternal Logos, from the beginning with God, and himself truly God<sup>116</sup> a commitment to a theocentric focus in preaching will be manifested in Christocentric sermons.

"Theocentric preaching inevitably becomes Christocentric not because the sermon always cites the name of Jesus or draws to mind some event from his earthly ministry, but because it demonstrates the reality of the human predicament that requires divine solution."<sup>117</sup> No less a preacher than Paul characterized his preaching as nothing except Jesus Christ and him crucified.<sup>118</sup> This did not make him a "johnny-one-note" with a slim sermon file. Paul presented the Word of God in its fullness.<sup>119</sup> Rather, Paul and all those who claim to preach the same message understand that the Scriptures are both a unity and a progression because they record the redemptive plan of God whose focus is Christ. As Greidanus stated, "The unity of redemptive history implies the *Christocentric* nature of

---

<sup>114</sup> Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology*, 75.

<sup>115</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 143.

<sup>116</sup> John 1:1,2

<sup>117</sup> Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 296.

<sup>118</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2

<sup>119</sup> Colossians 1:25

every historical text. Redemptive history is the history of Christ. He stands at its center, but no less at its beginning and end".<sup>120</sup>

## SUMMARY

To gain a bit of perspective on this momentous conclusion one may benefit from a brief review. This chapter began by exploring the basis for believing that we possess a revelation from God. It is a reliable record of his dealings with people over a span of several thousand years. This record is itself at least two thousand years old. But evidence in the documents causes one to conclude that this is a powerful, preserved, proclamational text. In addition to this Word from God, or Word *of* God, being provided, it was discovered to have serious implications on certain people, namely preachers. This Word they are commissioned to preach. It is still guaranteed to be a living, life-changing Word by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore those who preach this Word as it was given are privileged and positioned to be channels and instruments of God's grace announcing his saving work.

But enter the "Peter Principle" and that doesn't mean Cephas. It is possible, as experience shows, to misrepresent the Word that has been entrusted to preachers. In ways and for motives mentioned, those who preach can miss the mark even though they hold a high view of Scripture and do their homiletical homework. Because this is a real and prevalent problem, this chapter has carefully identified the biblical and theological foundations that will serve in conveying the true message of the text. These reflections began with a thorough study of the nature of this revelation. The Bible shows itself to be a

---

<sup>120</sup> Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, 135

record that is both unified and progressive. The interpretation of Scripture that best honors these realities is a theocentric or God-centered interpretation. The preaching, therefore, that best presents the Word is theocentric preaching.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **FOCUSED LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to survey the current literature that pertains to this thesis concerning theocentric preaching. The position advocated seeks to explain and establish the principles for a God-centered interpretation and proclamation of biblical texts. In order to organize this broad endeavor the chapter will initially explore the primacy of a theological approach to preaching. Next it will give overview to the use of the key term "theocentric" in literature. This term must be understood in its many uses in order to secure its precise meaning as applied to this thesis. Because the concern is for preaching, the third and fourth sections will discuss the implications for theocentrism in hermeneutics and homiletics, respectively. The fifth section will engage the important discussion on relevance, a topic that is not sacrificed but guaranteed by theocentric preaching. Following this literature review will be a survey of seminary courses currently offered that bear on the subject.

#### **THE ROLE OF THEOLOGY IN PREACHING**

Prevailing winds would blow contemporary preachers off course. The growing complexity of the congregation and the burgeoning burden of information pushes the preacher to dabble in many disciplines often at the expense of his theological knowledge. Wells has noted, "Two models of pastoral ministry have been vying for the Protestant mind in the twentieth century, especially in its evangelical expression. In the one model, theology is foundational, and in the other it is only peripheral."<sup>1</sup> Few voices currently

---

<sup>1</sup> David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 218.

advocate for a stronger theological orientation. Many recall the serious study of sturdy theologians in seminary. Those big tomes now gather dust as urgent issues conspire with clever marketing to arrest our attention and absorb our time. Wells observed conspiring pressures in the proliferation of expectations attached to the ministerial role. He cited a major study from 1934 which identified five clerical roles. By 1986, the list of ministerial roles had expanded to fourteen.<sup>2</sup> It would seem that theology is the last thing our congregations ask for and therefore need. Does the preacher of today have the time or necessity to attend to theology? A chorus of careful students and scholars can be assembled that respond with a resounding yes!

Among the company of today's respected homileticians, Craddock elevated the task of preaching as he extolled preachers, "Preaching today proclaims an event and participates in that event, both reports on revelation and participates in that revelation, bringing it home to the listeners not only in honest reporting but with the immediacy of a living voice addressed to these gathered here and now. The preacher then is a theologian."<sup>3</sup>

Reminiscent of the truth, "every believer is a witness, whether good or bad", it can be stated, "every preacher is a theologian, whether good or bad." It goes with the territory. Sleeth expressed this reality and priority when he said, "As important as it is to have a message then, and be able to develop God-given skills, the basis of Christian preaching rests firmly on a theological foundation."<sup>4</sup> The importance of this foundation

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 232-233.

<sup>3</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 47.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald E. Sleeth, "Theology of the Word", *Reformed Liturgy and Music Journal* 17 (Winter 1983), 8.

should not be underestimated. When theology gets short shrift the sermon will wobble. The tyranny of the urgent can cause neglect of the important. The consequences are first evident in the study, next in the pulpit and ultimately in the people. Shaw pointed out, "If we do not have a viable theology of preaching we have nothing to sustain us as preachers, and if we do not have a theology to preach we have nothing to sustain our hearers".<sup>5</sup> Being even more explicit regarding the theocentric or Christocentric focus, Shaw continued, "Preaching Christ is essential because we are Christian preachers. As Martin Luther maintained, 'We preach first Christ and last Christ and always Christ'"<sup>6</sup>

Theology is not merely to be something preachers mastered in the past to provide a frame of reference for their remarks. Theology is vital to safeguard preaching from fads and insignificant issues. Craddock confirmed this when he explained,

The second statement about the relation of theology to preaching can be expressed as a matter of size: theology prompts preaching to treat subjects of importance and avoid trivia. How easily sermons seem to err, not on the issue of truth but on the question as to whether what is said really matters. When preparing sermons, if preachers would write "So what?" at the top of the page, many little promotional talks or clever word games on "Salt Shakers and Light Bulbs" would quietly slip off the desk and hide in the wastebasket. Theology urges upon the pulpit a much larger agenda: creation, evil, grace, covenant, forgiveness, judgment, suffering, care of the earth and all God's creatures, justice, love and the reconciliation of the world to God. It is not out of order for theology to ask of preaching, What ultimate vision is held before us?"<sup>7</sup>

Theology, properly applied, insures the sermon will be significant. This does not imply that biblical sermons are equivalent to theological lectures. Dry dogmatics and abstract propositions are not the stuff of good sermons. It is an overcorrection to fill the message with large words and heavy concepts. Theology operates best in the interpretive

---

<sup>5</sup> Wayne Shaw, "Rediscovering Our Message", *Preaching* 11 (1995), 13.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>7</sup> Craddock, *Preaching*, 49.

process, informing the preacher of how his chosen text fits in the progressive unfolding of God's redemptive plan. Alongside historical and grammatical considerations the preacher addresses the theological implications and connections. Freed from atomistic attention, the passage escapes distortion caused by isolating it from the rest of Scripture and imposing upon it a meaning that is too strongly driven by contemporary concerns.

Lest the centrality of theology in preaching remain in question, it would serve the cause to articulate how one's knowledge of God is of utmost importance. Carson asked the question, What is the most urgent need in the church of the Western world today? After citing several plausible answers including; personal morality, political clout, financial integrity, evangelism and expository preaching, Carson concluded, "Clearly all of these are important. . . . But there is a sense in which these urgent needs are merely symptomatic of a far more serious lack. The one thing we most urgently need in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better."<sup>8</sup> How can this need be fully met without theologically informed preaching? How can sermons be substantive unless they are theocentric?

Understanding the pressure to conform message or music to the satisfactions of a congregation, McCullough said, "But sometimes, what passes for worship is more human-centered than God-centered. We want to make sure everyone "gets something" out of the experience, and for good reason: this tends to be the standard most of us use to judge whether a service was "meaningful" or not. Was *I* inspired? Were the sermon and music to *my* liking?"<sup>9</sup> This inverted value system characterizes our age as McCullough h.

---

<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 15.

<sup>9</sup> Donald W. McCullough, *The Trivialization of God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1995), 113.

concluded, "When the true story gets told, whether in the partial light of historical perspective or in the perfect light of eternity, it may well be revealed that the worst sin of the church at the end of the twentieth century has been the trivialization of God."<sup>10</sup>

Strong words befit a serious condition. The strong medicine required to withstand the symptoms of rampant individualism and philosophical pluralism is theology. It holds up the true view of God while it holds down the vaulted view of self. Integrating the need to better know God and the role of theology in preaching, Smith found evangelicalism's depth of the knowledge of God is directly proportional to the quality of theological preaching in the church. Smith lamented, however, that theology is often served in a distasteful manner -- in textbook language with little practical application. The goal of the preacher, he concluded, should be twofold: to change people's minds as to what theology is, and to communicate theology in a manner that is intelligible and applicable to twentieth century Christians. Theology is not the reading of books but the relentless pursuit of the knowledge of God.<sup>11</sup>

Preaching is not the exclusive domain of theology. Clapp, speaking from the perspective of priestly stewardship, commented, "After all, it emphasizes that the right end and ordering of all creation is doxological, oriented toward the praise of God."<sup>12</sup> His insights fortify the place of a doxological and theological perspective. Surely preaching should not exclude theology. In offering practical advice to preachers, Sproul counseled, "Two things. One, focus your preaching on the character of God. Two, preach at least 75

---

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>11</sup> James K. S. Smith, "Theological Preaching: Congregational Repellent?" *Emmaeus Journal* (1993), 193-205.

<sup>12</sup> Rodney Clapp, "Why the Devil Takes Visa", *Christianity Today* 40 (October 7, 1996), 33.

percent of your sermons from the Old Testament."<sup>13</sup> Trotter, in his survey of different theologies of preaching, identified four prominent categories of preaching today: (1) preaching the theology of the text -- classical Protestant theology being the hermeneutical key; (2) preaching out of spiritual experience -- God experienced in congregational life has authority alongside text; (3) preaching for either/or decision -- presenting a confrontive God, using narrative; and (4) preaching the struggle for social justice -- not necessarily using the Bible. Recognizing this diversity, Trotter concluded, "We live in a period when there are no great systematic theologians; the theologies of preaching reflect this pluralism."<sup>14</sup>

This diversity is actually a disparity. A low regard of the biblical text is evident when it is subordinated to the experiences of the congregation or society. Evangelicals are more prone to a subconscious subversion of the text when the need to address the "human condition" of the congregation is allowed to shape an anthropocentric sermon at the expense of the intended theocentric meaning. Seeking to safeguard the proper interpretation of the text Warren advocates a paradigm for preaching that incorporates exegetical, theological, and homiletical stages. Regarding the concern here, Warren stated, "Preaching that lacks solid theological footing also lacks authority. Students of preaching must become students of theology as well, developing skill in doing theology."<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> R. C. Sproul, "Theology and Preaching in the 90's", interview with Michael Duduit *Preaching* 9 (March-April 1995), 23.

<sup>14</sup> J. Irwin Trotter, "Our Theologies of Preaching", *Quarterly Review* 15 (Fall 1995), 248.

<sup>15</sup> Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991), 485.

Expanding on this integral component to the hermeneutical and homiletical process Kaiser wrote about the theological use of the Bible. In particular, the theological task of the interpreter, according to Kaiser, includes recognizing the unity of the Scripture. This unity presupposes and exposes the theocentric or Christocentric nature of the Bible. Kaiser, discussing the unity of Scripture, said, "Such a unity is based on four pillars: (1) the fact that Scripture has one single, divine Author; (2) the fact that Christ is present in the Old Testament, not only virtually or implicitly, but directly, since the prophets speak of him; (3) the fact that Christ is the center of the Scriptures; and (4) the fact that the doctrines within the Scripture are linked together throughout the text and tend to build one upon another."<sup>16</sup>

A final question deserves to be heard before closing this initial section on the role of theology in preaching. Granted there is the need for theology to inform and inspire the preaching task, what about the particular place of that branch called systematic theology? Can it be employed without prejudicing the exegetical process? Silva responded to this concern as he observed the suspicion of many evangelicals toward systematic theology in the hermeneutical process. To suppose that it is possible to set this aside and do "pure" exegesis he considered naive. Furthermore, Silva cited three reasons for consciously recognizing the role of systematic theology in sermon preparation: "(1) recognize that systematic theology is, to a large extent, an exercise in contextualization, that is, the attempt to reformulate the teachings of Scripture in ways that are meaningful and understandable to us in our present context; (2) our evangelical view of the unity of

---

<sup>16</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 198.

Scripture demands that we see the whole Bible as the context of any one part; (3) finally, my proposal will sound a lot less shocking once we remember that, as a matter of fact, everyone does it anyway."<sup>17</sup> Whether the preacher admits to a systematic theology (see Silva above) that guides his preparation or he attests to a biblical theology (see Kaiser above) that stems from a unified and progressive revelation, theology is indispensable.

Preaching would indeed be impoverished if it had no theological dimension. This section, in its survey of pertinent literature, endeavored to show the centrality of theology in the task of preaching. Theology is the basis for a theocentric interpretation. The benefits of an astute theological understanding far outweigh the drawbacks perpetrated by those whose sermons confuse theological literacy with theology lectures.

#### THE USE OF THE TERM "THEOCENTRIC" IN CURRENT LITERATURE

For many the term "theocentric" is unfamiliar. In the case of this writer it was first encountered in the context of homiletics and particularly in the book by Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. In the process of conducting a focused literature review the term "theocentric" surfaced in several sources not associated with homiletics. It will be helpful to explore "theocentric" in its various applications before it is specifically defined in relation to preaching and this thesis.

In the early 1980's theocentric emerged to a notable degree when it was used by Gustafson to define his view of ethics.<sup>18</sup> This is worthy of further comment because it contributed significantly to a useful understanding of the term. Gustafson intoned, "The

---

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 261-263.

<sup>18</sup> James M. Gustafson, *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

temptation of religion is always to put the Deity and the forces of religious piety in the service of the immediate needs and desires of individuals, small groups, and societies. . . . God is denied as God; God becomes an instrument in the service of human beings rather than human beings instruments in the service of God. The fact that this has almost always been the case, and that it is the case at the present time, is no warrant for accepting it as normative."<sup>19</sup> Hinlicky observed that the publication of Gustafson's monumental work "represents far more than a new theory of theological ethics; it is an attack, austere and disciplined, upon the most striking features of contemporary (i.e., post neo-orthodox) religion and theology."<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here that "theocentric" has a polemic element. Whereas this thesis finds its primary locus within evangelicalism and is concerned with correcting anthropocentric preaching, the issues identified by theocentrism bear upon other contemporary theological viewpoints as well. Hinlicky gave a historical perspective of the issue when he added, "The great reformers' sense for God as not merely the agent but himself in his reign the content of human salvation *may* aptly be called theocentric."<sup>21</sup>

How theology is approached today also must encounter a theocentric perspective. Hinlicky clarified the matter, "The issue for a theocentric theology revolves around the (awesome!) question whether theology can speak of the world from God's perspective, of how our recognition of "God as God" can be, in the first place God's recognition of us. (Galatians 4:19)."<sup>22</sup> The dilemma is largely avoided by preachers with a high view of inspiration, but it remains problematic for others.

---

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>20</sup> Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theocentrism", *Dialog* 26 (Fall 1987), 258.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 259.

Gustafson's expansive application of "theocentric" encompasses all of life. He claimed one must work to develop a theocentric interpretation of the whole of life.<sup>23</sup> Barr captured a quote of Gustafson that powerfully addresses the importance of a theocentric perspective, "What is deficient in the pieties and moral disciplines of contemporary church life is what Calvin and the Reformed Tradition have accented with particular strength, namely a theocentric focus for all of life: that vital sense of human limits and realism about human corruption in the face of the holiness of God."<sup>24</sup>

Gustafson contended that our culture, including much of contemporary religion, makes the human the center of value and the goal of creation. With vigor Gustafson ended his second volume of *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, by declaring, "God will not be manipulated. God will not be ignored or denied. God will be God."<sup>25</sup>

Theocentrism as a concept has also traversed from ethics to ecology. Confirming the wide ownership and preferred perspective of theocentrism, Rossi called for its influence on the environment. Recognizing the reality of the ecological crisis, Rossi said it is time to get religion. He warned to "beware of anthropocentric or biocentric solutions. Christian ecology has to be rooted in what we call 'theocentrism'".<sup>26</sup>

The use of theocentric occurs, not just in other disciplines, but also in other lands

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 260.

<sup>23</sup> James M. Gustafson, "A Theocentric Interpretation of Life", *Christian Century* (July 30-August 6, 1980), 754-760.

<sup>24</sup> Browne Barr, "Nametags and the Theocentric Focus", *Christian Century* (November 26, 1980), 1158-1161.

<sup>25</sup> William Schweiker, "Theocentric Ethics: God Will Be God", *Christian Century* (January 15, 1986), 36-38.

<sup>26</sup> Vincent Rossi, "Christian Ecology: A Theocentric Practice", *Epiphany Journal* 8 (Fall 1987), 8.

Yusufu Obaje, professor at Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary, addressed the nature of the church. Is it Christocentric, Pneumatocentric or Theocentric? After exploring each he concluded, "The Church is the work of one God who is God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Therefore ecclesiology seen in its wholeness must remain theocentric. The implications of this were noted by Obaje, who stated, "the theocentric model of the Church exposes the African convert to a more comprehensive view of mission. The Church as a God-centered community derives its view of mission from God's own involvement in the world he has created and is caring for as God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."<sup>27</sup>

In a subsequent article, Obaje pursued a more relevant doctrine of Christ for African Christians. He explained, "There is a God-centered or God-ward approach here to the doctrine of Christ. This is in contrast to the man-ward approach which is popular among many scholars of Christianity today. . . . Theocentric Christology is a doctrine of Christ which is centered on God who only is the ultimate revealer of himself to man, the One who has come as Jesus of Nazareth -- fully man and fully God, without any contradiction because he is God."<sup>28</sup>

Theocentric, as used by Obaje, conveys a Trinitarian view of God. It stands within orthodox Christian doctrine to exalt the divine above the human. Not everyone employs theocentric, however, in a way that is compatible with evangelical theology. Because the term is in wider circulation, it is essential that the intended definition be understood before

---

<sup>27</sup> Yusufu Ameh Obaje, "Is Ecclesiology Soley Christocentric, Pneumatocentric or Theocentric?", *Ogobomoso Journal of Theology* 2 (December 1987), 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> Yusufu Ameh Obaje, "Theocentric Christology as a Basis for a More Relevant Doctrine of Christ for the African Christian", *Ogobomoso Journal of Theology* 5 (December 1990), 4-5.

the concept is embraced. The polemic nature of "theocentric" shifts for some modern theologians from contrasting the anthropocentric to opposing the Christocentric. Upon his retirement from Princeton, Professor J. Christiaan Beker was hailed as a theocentric theologian of hope. In his book, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Beker recasts Paul's theology as a theocentric theology of hope rather than the Christocentric-salvation history of Oscar Cullmann.<sup>29</sup> Clearly the use of theocentric has here lost its evangelical sense of being synonymous with Christocentric.

More drastic still, is the use of theocentric by Knitter. He stated, "Inclusive Christologies tend to affirm a theocentric universe, one in which God, with divine revelation and salvation can be present beyond Jesus Christ, within all world religions."<sup>30</sup> Knitter concluded, "In boldly proclaiming that God has indeed been defined by Jesus, Christians will also humbly admit that God has not been confined to Jesus."<sup>31</sup> This post-modernist perspective strikes evangelicals as nothing short of blasphemous. He espouses a pluralism that could be utterly ignored were it not for its misappropriation of the useful term, theocentric. Carson pointed out that Knitter advocated a deliberate move from a Christocentric to a theocentric perspective. Carson continued, "By this he hoped to remove what is unique to Christianity, and thereby open up greater reciprocity and dialogue between Christianity and other world religions. A necessary step is to show that Christ himself put God at the center of his thought. If so, then correspondingly it behooves us to develop a "theocentric Christology".<sup>32</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Patrick D. Miller "A Theocentric Theologian of Hope", *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 16 (1995), 22-35.

<sup>30</sup> Paul F. Knitter, "Theocentric Christology", *Theology Today* 40 (July 1983), 130.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>32</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 325

It must not go unnoticed that Obae and Knitter included identical terms in their article titles, but with divergent meanings. This confronts the preacher with the need to clarify his terms, not just for himself but also for his listeners. After this long recital of various uses of theocentric it may be tempting to consider abandoning the term altogether. The loss would exceed the gain. Theocentric, properly understood as that interpretation of Scripture that guarantees the primacy of God revealing himself and his redemptive plan, is still a valuable term. Especially is this true when it is understood as wholly compatible with Christocentric. These terms, though not identical, are inseparable because Christ is God.

While theocentric is used widely in disciplines beyond homiletics or even theology, it also is used richly in relation to preaching and doctrine. As presented in chapter 2, many advocate for a theocentric focus in the hermeneutic and homiletic processes including, Sidney Greidanus, John Stott, J. I. Packer and Bryan Chapell.<sup>33</sup> Having demonstrated the strong support of theocentric perspective there, the emphasis of this section is to give further evidence of the widespread acknowledgment that life, the Bible, and preaching, in particular, should be seen from a God-centered viewpoint.

A remarkable agreement on the veracity of a theocentric perspective can be found among both those who are covenantal and dispensational. As a dispensationalist, Ryrie, over 30 years ago, revealed keen insight when he wrote, "Scripture is not man-centered as though salvation were the main theme, but it is God-centered because His glory is at the center."<sup>34</sup> From another direction, H. Henry Meeter identified the basic principle of Calvinism when he stated, "The central thought of Calvinism is, therefore, the great

---

<sup>33</sup> For detail see bibliography at end of chapter 5, and footnotes within chapter 2.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), 46.

thought of God. . . . The Calvinist does not start out with some interest of man, for example, his conversion or his justification. . . . He seeks to realize as his ruling concept in life the truth of Scripture: 'Of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To whom be glory forever' (Romans 11:36)."<sup>35</sup> It would obscure the distinctives of each of these theological positions to imply that they are entirely compatible, but both insist that God is at the center.

Because Scripture is theocentric, preaching Scripture should yield sermons that are theocentric or Christocentric. Among many models of preaching, McKim quoted Robert Gnuse's description of preachers using the Christocentric model, "Those who select a part of Biblical text or an important theological concept to serve as a norm by which to interpret the rest of the Bible and by which Scripture gains authority, e g , Luther or Barth."<sup>36</sup> The merits of this definition notwithstanding, it does consider Christocentric preaching as a recognizable category.

Better application of the Christocentric or theocentric approach is found elsewhere, such as Jones and Velema. Jones noted the varied attempts to convey the unity between the Old and New Testaments. Moral ones are easily grasped and lead to "moralistic preaching". Such preaching ignores the eschatological discontinuities such as (promise/fulfillment) between the Old and the New. Knowing what the cross and resurrection mean in our salvation and what they tell us about God is the most important starting point in interpreting Scripture and forming a faithful sermon.<sup>37</sup> Velema offered

---

<sup>35</sup> H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 17-18.

<sup>36</sup> Donald K. McKim, *The Bible in Theology and Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 197.

<sup>37</sup> Stuart R. Jones, "Balaam, The Magi and Herod: A Study of Continuity in God's

more precise advice for approaching the Psalms. When preaching the Psalms, one should not start with the experience of the psalmist. The starting-point should be that which is revealed about God in the Psalms. The situation of the psalmist is not the issue of comparison, let alone of application. The message of a sermon on a Psalm should be who God wants to be in the psalmist's despair, how God wants to be called upon, how God wants to be trusted and believed in through difficult circumstances. Then, according to Velema, the preacher should move to draw a line from the Psalms to Christ in the New Testament. While man speaks both in the Psalm and in the sermon, God has the first and last word.<sup>38</sup> It must be clarified, however, Christ can be found in the Old Testament, too.

These advocates of theocentric perspective demonstrate its breadth of reception and illustrate its wealth of application. They are not, by any means, alone. Guinness and Seel issued a serious call for evangelicals to abandon the idolatries of our age and recover the forgotten first things, "Today's ultimate battle is the battle for the gospel -- its supernatural realities, ethical imperatives, and disorienting simplicity as well as its doctrinal distinctives."<sup>39</sup> Listed among the five forgotten fundamentals is the need for "Christ-centered thinking as the fruit of the imparting of the mind of Christ."<sup>40</sup> They explained the great need to give God his proper place and the path for doing so. In review of current conditions they wrote, "Contemporary evangelicals are no longer people of truth. Only rarely are they serious about theology. . . . Repelled by 'seminary theology' that

---

Revelation and Redemptive-Historical Preaching", *Kerux* 10 (1995), 3-9.

<sup>38</sup> W. H. Velema, "Preaching and the Psalms", *Reformed Theological Review* 553 (1994), 63-72.

<sup>39</sup> Os Guinness & John Seel, eds. *No God But God* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

is specialized, professionalized and dry, evangelicals are attracted by movements that have replaced theology with emphases that are relational, therapeutic, charismatic and managerial (as in church growth). Whatever their virtues, none of these emphases gives truth and theology the place they require in the life and thought of a true disciple."<sup>41</sup>

Guinness and Seel noted the neglected element is indeed the needed prescription, "Yet truth and theology are the royal road to knowing God. No one can love God and not be a theologian."<sup>42</sup>

Perhaps more adamant and academic, Wells wrote of the place for theology, "I do so on the assumption that theology is a knowledge that belongs first and foremost to the people of God and that the proper and primary audience for theology is therefore the Church, not the learned guild."<sup>43</sup> Concerning the role of theology in the church, however, Wells lamented, "So it is with theology in the Church. It remains on the edges of evangelical life, but it has been dislodged from its center."<sup>44</sup> Bringing this crisis into the realm of preaching and the purview of this thesis, Wells conducted a survey and noted, "At issue, in short, was the prevailing *Geist* in today's pulpit. Is it anthropocentric or is it theocentric? The overwhelming proportion of the sermons analyzed -- more than 80 percent -- were anthropocentric."<sup>45</sup> It would be profitable to articulate again that theocentric sermons are not entirely or exclusively about God. Wells pointed out that there are many other legitimate subjects that can be treated in a sermon. But whatever the

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>43</sup> Wells, *No Place for Truth*, 5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 252.

subject matter, the sermon should have as its foundation the reality, character and acts of God, in other words the sermon is to be theocentric.

Historical depth can also be marshaled in defense of theocentrism. In searching for a fundamental motif to explain the metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards, McClymand observed, "The term 'theocentrism' expresses a point commonly agreed upon in relation to Edwards, viz., his strong and even overweening preoccupation with deity. One might call him a 'God-intoxicated Calvinist'."<sup>46</sup> McClymand explained that theocentric in practice means that God is the measure of all things. Edwards sought to turn the tables on the Enlightenment's anthropocentrism. In a model of balance, "Edwards consistently strives to exalt God but not distance God from the world."<sup>47</sup>

Not wishing to lose sight of the overarching purpose for this literature review it may be noted here that the perspective for theocentric preaching "in a nutshell" is captured by this phrase, "God is the measure of all things." Anthropocentric preaching, on the other hand, reflects the position of Protagoras who said, "Man is the measure of all things." Many anthropocentric sermons are crafted by men who truly love and worship God, but the gravitational pull of human need often distorts the interpretive process. This literature review may create a counter-weight by citing the numerous sources that support theocentric or Christocentric preaching.

Expository preaching seeks to be true to the Word. The Christocentric nature of Scripture was recognized by Martin Luther, whose whole doctrine was erected on the

---

<sup>46</sup> Michael J. McClymand, "God the Measure: Towards an Understanding of Jonathan Edwards' Theocentric Metaphysics", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47 (1994), 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 48

foundation of *sola scriptura*. Historian Timothy George stated, "What gave Luther's doctrine its unique reformational character was its radical Christocentric basis. As early as 1515, Luther was stressing the Christ-centeredness of Scripture: 'He who would read the Bible must simply take heed that he does not err, for the Scripture may permit itself to be stretched and led, but let no one lead it according to his own inclinations but let him lead it to the source, that is the cross of Christ. Then he will surely strike the center'." <sup>48</sup> This Christocentric sense, Luther maintained, was plainly stated by Christ himself. Further, he recognized that while all Scripture treats of Christ, not all of Scripture speaks equally plainly about Christ.

A contemporary preacher who promotes a theocentric perspective is John Piper. Piper commended the rise of God-centered music in worship services but questioned why the sermons that follow are much less likely to be God-centered. He concluded it is because preachers, themselves, are not moved by the greatness of God. Their attention is absorbed by the urgent issues of human problems or church growth. Piper, however, has forcefully stated, "My conviction is that the aim of preaching - no less than singing - is God-exalting worship. . . . The aim of preaching is to deal with divorce worshipfully, and to deal with teenagers worshipfully, and to deal with anger worshipfully. Preaching exalts the centrality of God in all of life or it is not Christian preaching." <sup>49</sup> Overcoming the human-centered sermon is necessary Piper pointed out because of the nature of Scripture. "And what is there in Scripture mainly is God. The all-pervasive, all-important,

---

<sup>48</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville: Broadman, 1988), 83.

<sup>49</sup> John Piper, "Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation", Three manuscripts from *The Rom Lectures* at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (November 1993), Lecture 1.3.

all-surpassing reality in every text is God. Whether he is commanding or warning or promising or teaching, he is there."<sup>50</sup>

Another contemporary spokesman, Carson addressed the multitude of interpretations that can arise from one gospel passage, such as Matthew 11:1-11, "If instead you go through this passage and you talk about perseverance or you talk about the nature of faith or you talk about privilege and you miss the centrality of Jesus Christ in the gospels, of all places where he is above all set forth, it is not Christocentric, faithful, biblical, theological preaching."<sup>51</sup>

Theocentric or Christocentric preaching is needed, according to Armstrong, if we are to experience revival. Armstrong said, "Churches in the West need genuine, deep, biblical reformation. They also need a visitation from God, what was called revival in times past. A major component needed as we seek to bring the church back to God and prayerfully urge her to pray for revival is God-centered, powerful preaching."<sup>52</sup>

"Of many important conditions for Christian communication, none is more necessary than the centrality of Jesus Christ himself", so stated Stott in the context of evangelism.<sup>53</sup> Christ-centeredness is evidenced in the model, message and motive for evangelism. Speaking of the highest motive for evangelizing Stott said, "It is the zeal for the glory of Jesus Christ. God has exalted Jesus to his right hand. . . . If God desires Jesus

---

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., Lecture 2.2-3.

<sup>51</sup> D. A. Carson, "The Primacy of Expository Preaching: Priorities and Pitfalls" (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 1995), Audio cassette 2.

<sup>52</sup> John H. Armstrong, "Preaching - God's Way to Reformation and Revival" *Reformation & Revival Journal* 1 (Fall 1992), 17.

<sup>53</sup> John Stott, "Communication, Context, and the Centrality of Jesus Christ", *Japan Christian Quarterly* 51 (Summer 1985), 154.

Christ to be thus honored, his people must desire it too."<sup>54</sup> This instructive article provides an important insight for understanding the gospel in a Christocentric framework. To many evangelicals the gospel is synonymous with an altar call. This, however, does not exhaust the rich sense of the word, for the gospel is Jesus Christ. Preaching the gospel is preaching Jesus Christ; that is, bringing forth a biblical message that is Christocentric.

Homiletician Larsen instructed students of the Word when he said, "our preaching of any part of Scripture must stand within a clear sense of theological construct, and for the Christian proclaimer that construct is Christocentric."<sup>55</sup> In this sense Larsen explained that all biblical preaching is doctrinal preaching. Citing the Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics (1982) he quoted, "The person and work of Jesus Christ are the central focus of the entire Bible. We deny any method of interpretation which rejects or obscures the Christ-centeredness of the Bible is correct."<sup>56</sup> After counseling the preacher against using the Bible for moralistic lessons, Larsen extolled, "It is our privilege and joy to place the frame of Christ around the passage. God's purpose in Christ is creative, redemptive, providential and eschatological, that is, he makes, saves, cares and completes, and this is all in Jesus Christ. Christ is the critical issue."<sup>57</sup>

Lest one lose sight of the living person of Christ in the process of preparing and preaching, Davis offered this refreshing reminder, "But the truth we preach is not an abstract thing. The truth is a Person. The goodness we preach is not an ideal quality. The goodness is Someone who is good. . . . The truth, the goodness is God in Christ."<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>55</sup> David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 164.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>58</sup> Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958), 19.

This section, which has established that "theocentric" is a widely used and highly regarded concept, will briefly examine the antithesis, being anthropocentrism. By posing the question, Is Anthropocentricity Christian?, Linzey confronts the issue. In his response to Hans Kung's position that God's will is defined in terms of man's well-being, Linzey rebutted the position when he stated, "It can only be held ultimately at the cost of other theological insights into the nature of God as Creator, the creation and man's moral responsibility for it."<sup>59</sup> The implications of anthropocentricity range well beyond preaching. Hunter coined what may amount to an oxymoron when he described American Evangelicalism as embodying "psychological christocentrism". Tracking the shift in piety from sacrifice to personal fulfillment, Hunter found 32.5 percent of religious books dealt with emotional health. He concluded, "For what they all share is a psychological christocentrism -- a view of authentic mental and emotional health as rooted in the establishment of a harmonious relationship with God through Jesus Christ for only God really transforms. This christocentrism would of course be expected of evangelicals."<sup>60</sup> It may be considered oxymoronic because Christocentric, as it has been established above, is not the true nature of this phenomenon. Rather, the indications are anthropocentric within an evangelical context and vocabulary. Hunter's findings support the concerns and conclusions of Guinness and Seel as noted above.

Hauerwas, who identifies with mainstream churches, was motivated to pull the mask off modernity and post-modernity, exposing them for their anthropocentric

---

<sup>59</sup> Andrew Linzey, "Is Anthropocentricity Christian?", *Theology* 84 (January 1981), 20.

<sup>60</sup> James Davison Hunter, *American Evangelicalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983), 95.

perspective. He wrote, "Modernity said that God is a projection of the ideals and wants of what it means to be human so let us serve and worship the only God that matters--that is, the human. Postmodernists, in the quest to be thorough in their atheism, now deny that the human exists. Postmodernists are thus the atheists that only modernity could produce."<sup>61</sup> Pressing the attack, he quoted Bottum, "postmodernity is still in the line of modernity, as rebellion against rebellion is still rebellion. as an attack on the constraints of grammar must still be written in grammatical sentences, as a skeptical argument against the structures of rationality must still be put rationally."<sup>62</sup> The reason for including this review in this chapter is because Hauerwas exposed the "high humanism of contemporary theology and preaching."<sup>63</sup> Concerning preaching, he wrote, "The very activity of preaching--the proclamation of a story that cannot be known apart from such proclamation--is an affront to the ethos of freedom. As the Church, we stand under the word because we know we are told what we otherwise could not know. We stand under the word because we know we need to be told what to do. We stand under the word because we do not believe we have minds worth making up on our own."<sup>64</sup>

In conclusion, whether the anthropocentrism is impeding the homiletical process, or, in its more virulent form, it is corrupting the religious consciousness, Hauerwas offered this word, "God knows what he is doing in this strange time between "worlds," but hopefully he is inviting us again to engage the enemy through the godly weapons of preaching and sacrament."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, "Preaching As Though We Had Enemies", *First Things* 53 (May 1995), 45.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 48.

## HERMENEUTICS IN THEOCENTRIC PREACHING

The development of sermons may be cast in three general categories; exegesis, hermeneutics and homiletics. The former is concerned with the interpretive process and is often accomplished by engaging in historical and grammatical study. It is the thesis of this paper that an additional dimension must also be explored to insure an accurate understanding of the text. This third discipline involves the theological, or theocentric approach. It asks of the passage questions like; why did God provide this Scripture? what does it tell of God and his redemptive purposes? how does it relate to other Scriptures? In this section the literature that addresses hermeneutical issues, especially in connection to theocentric preaching, is reviewed.

"Hermeneutics predisposes one's homiletics." This sums up in a popular way the interaction and interdependence between the two processes. In a more scholarly way, Kaiser, contributing a chapter entitled, "Legitimate Hermeneutics", summarized, "Much of current debate over the Scripture among believing Christians is, at its core, a result of failure on the part of evangelicals to come to terms with the issue of hermeneutics."<sup>66</sup> In a similar vein, Larsen declared, "We may vigorously defend the authority of Holy Scripture--and we ought to do so--but then lose everything in the area of hermeneutics."<sup>67</sup> Having said this Larsen accounted for differences that result from study when he observed, "Hermeneutics is not an exact science. We all bring our systems, traditions, prejudices and sin to the task of understanding Scripture."<sup>68</sup> These variances, however, do

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Donald K. McKim, ed. *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 111.

<sup>67</sup> Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching*, 157.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 159.

not imply the text has more than one meaning or that the subjective view of the interpreter rules over the text. "The Bible has a status as revealed truth regardless of who approaches it or how. It has a life independent of my self-understanding."<sup>69</sup>

Change in hermeneutical approach, though prevalent today, has historical precedent. Jonathan Edwards dared depart from the "plain style" of the Puritans. He wrote, "Nothing is more manifest in fact, than that the things of religion take hold of men's souls no further than they affect them."<sup>70</sup> Not given to short sentences, Edwards expressed why lectures were no substitute for stirring sermons:

God hath appointed a particular and lively application of His Word to men in the preaching of it, as a fit means to affect sinners with the importance of the things of religion, and their own misery and necessity of a remedy, and the glory and sufficiency of a remedy provided; and to stir up the pure minds of the saints, and quicken their affections, by often bringing the great things of religion to their remembrance, and setting them before them in their proper colours, though they know them, and have been fully instructed in them already, 2 Peter 1:12, 13.<sup>71</sup>

Logan, in observing the hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards, offered this broader principle, "an individual's hermeneutical methodology--the way in which he conceives of and carries out his task as interpreter--this establishes the form and style of the sermons which he preaches."<sup>72</sup> The theocentric nature of Edwards sermons did not result in merely logical and doctrinal dissertations, but gave place to the sensations and affections Edwards, according to Logan, expanded the definition of hermeneutics, "Hermeneutics by definition involves not just the discovery of objective truth, as important, as critical as that is. Hermeneutics also involves the molding of the interpreting self by the truth which is

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1961), 30.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

<sup>72</sup> Samuel T. Logan, Jr. "The Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards", *The Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (Fall 1980), 85.

discovered."<sup>73</sup> These insights are worthy of attention because they are derived from Edwards who is regarded as one of America's greatest thinkers. Logan claimed the hermeneutical pattern of Edwards will help contemporary Reformed preachers recover the balance by addressing the affections; the heart as well as the mind.<sup>74</sup>

Hermeneutics is a complex subject. Especially is this true today. Long summed up the current climate, "The preacher who yearns for a clear and simple text-to-sermon method, who wants to 'paint by the numbers' homiletically, will surely be frustrated in the volatile environment of contemporary biblical hermeneutics."<sup>75</sup> Truly skilled at sorting through this diversity is Professor Anthony Thiselton, who put it in helpful perspective. "Traditionally hermeneutics entailed the formulation of rules for the understanding of an ancient text, especially in linguistic and historical terms. However, hermeneutics in the more recent sense of the term begins with the recognition that historical conditioning is two-sided: the modern interpreter, no less than the text, stands in a given historical context and tradition."<sup>76</sup> Thiselton continued, "The nature of the hermeneutical problem is shaped by the fact that both the text and the interpreter are conditioned by their given place in history."<sup>77</sup> Recognizing this reality is not, according to Thiselton, an insurmountable problem. The preacher is not left without hope of discerning the meaning of the text. It is a matter of bringing these "two horizons"; the text and the interpreter, into relationship. This initially involves "distancing" oneself from the text, respecting its

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>75</sup> Thomas G. Long, "The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Preaching", *Interpretation* 44 (1990), 352.

<sup>76</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 11.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 16.

different world of origin. Following this step is the "entering" or engaging of the text to gain understanding through careful study.<sup>78</sup> Thiselton is an ally of evangelicals who are disturbed and bewildered by the proliferation of hermeneutical theories which divest the text of any sacredness. Morgan, in reviewing Thiselton's more recent book, observed the author's hostility toward theories which see the readers as creating meaning. "Behind this rejection of some current trends stands Thiselton's affinity with the Reformers' appeal to scripture against the dominant ecclesiastical tradition."<sup>79</sup> In his review of the same book, Brown pointed out that, "while seeing the complexity of the problem, Thiselton is not prepared to surrender the question of authorial intention."<sup>80</sup>

Speaking for himself Thiselton said, "The major hermeneutical point about the cross, however, lies in *its discontinuity with contextual or self-centered criteria of relevance; rather, it establishes new criteria of relevance*."<sup>81</sup> The cross is the undoing of self-imposed meanings which stem from self-centered interpretations. Thiselton confronts the self-focused hermeneutic that presumes to determine what God has to say. Quoting Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Thiselton wrote, "God is not necessarily 'a God who in some way corresponds to me, is agreeable to me, fits in with my nature'".<sup>82</sup>

God stands apart from and above us. This is true, too, of his revelation. Therefore, it is with caution that Bailey's description of the theological approach to hermeneutics is

---

<sup>78</sup> John Stott, *The Contemporary Christian* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 187. Stott is helpful in explaining the essence of this complex argument.

<sup>79</sup> Robert Morgan, "Scrutiny of Interpretations", *The Expository Times* 104 (March 1993), 187.

<sup>80</sup> Colin Brown, "Book Reviews", *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (April 1995), 236.

<sup>81</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 614.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 619.

encountered. "Theological hermeneuts look not behind the text, in the text, or in front of the text, but above the text."<sup>83</sup> Thiselton, engaging in understatement, posed the question, "if address *to* God can be understood as initiated by the Holy Spirit, how much more in the case of address *from* God?"<sup>84</sup> By his nature God is capable of giving a revelation that can be received as reliable as well as comprehensible. The modern preacher can humbly approach the biblical text with confidence.

Confidence in God is a mark of theocentric preaching for it takes as foundational the fact that God is guiding history and Scripture is the record of his purposeful activity. A heart settled on God's sovereignty will withstand the chorus that calls for compromise. Many have recognized the enormous pressure that changes place on the preacher. Phelps noted that the contextual reality in which the American pastor ministers and preaches today is in the process of significant change.<sup>85</sup> Schulze has echoed this experience in Africa. The shift of attention from the biblical text to the recipient in modern homiletics is partly due to the deep influence of auxiliary sciences on homiletics, especially linguistics with its reception theory resulting in increased anthropocentric preaching.<sup>86</sup> There are those who chart change, not merely to alert, but to alter homiletics. From Germany, Krieg observed that a new pluralistic audience requires a new homiletic. Contemporary thought emphasizes the importance of the hearer in communication. The sermon is only one part of coherent worship. Poetic speech is preferred to objective dogma. The layman no longer

---

<sup>83</sup> Raymond Bailey, ed. *Hermeneutics for Preaching* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 193.

<sup>84</sup> Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, 619.

<sup>85</sup> Dennis L. Phelps, "What Happened to Homiletics", *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry* 2 (1993), 15-28.

<sup>86</sup> L. F. Schulze, "Anthropocentric Preaching", *In Die Skriflig Afrikaans* 28 (1994), 353-370.

feels the relevance of declaring dogmatically that Jesus was both divine and human, but desires a personal relationship with Jesus.<sup>87</sup> This reflects the anthropocentric problem.

Perceiving the American Protestant pulpit's loss of influence, Buttrick suggested the need to reconsider our notions of revelation and widen our focus to address people as social creatures.<sup>88</sup> On a similar theme, Brueggemann recommended that preaching must change since authority is suspect and pluralism in the pew demands dialogue and texts are open to multiple interpretations.<sup>89</sup> Bailey recognized that change, innovation, marketing seem to be the driving forces shaping the American preaching scene. Factors to consider are shorter sermons and drama replacing traditional preaching.<sup>90</sup>

In the same journal issue Massey stressed the need for proper study of Scriptures as the basis for preaching. Pulpit work at its best attends to what the biblical text actually says and means. This demands consideration of context and theology, along with the needs of the people. More than hermeneutical principles, the preacher and the congregation need the help of the Holy Spirit.<sup>91</sup>

A review of the literature reveals the divergent views being promoted under the banner of hermeneutics. The discipline of hermeneutics is influenced by postmodernity and the "new hermeneutic" elevates subjective interpretation over objective truth. The loss of influence in the pulpit may be both cause and effect of this shift. Hermeneutics, however,

---

<sup>87</sup> Gustav A. Krieg, "The Old Text - The New Message" *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 119 (1994), 195-210.

<sup>88</sup> David G. Buttrick, "Preaching in America", *Concordia Journal* 16 (1990), 90-98.

<sup>89</sup> Walter Brueggemann, "Preaching as Reimagination", *Theology Today* 52 (1995), 313-329.

<sup>90</sup> Raymond Bailey, "Preaching in the Electronic Villiage", *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993), 351-357.

<sup>91</sup> James Earl Massey, "Hermeneutics for Preaching", *Review and Expositor* 90 (1993), 359-369.

remains a vital aspect of the preaching task. It bears repeating that hermeneutics determines homiletics. It is to the latter that this chapter now turns.

## HOMILETICS IN THEOCENTRIC PREACHING

Preaching, according to a review of current books and articles, is in crisis. But this is not the first time nor the last word. Many authors acknowledge the problems that face preaching, while holding it in high regard. Hauerwas chided Christians when he said, "Christians' attitudes toward modernity have primarily been characterized by a sense of inferiority. . . . Christians in modernity thought their task was to make the Gospel intelligible to the world rather than to help the world understand why it could not be intelligible without the Gospel."<sup>92</sup>

Putting an even sharper point to it Ortlund criticized the evangelical church for operating in a man-centered rather than a God-centered mode.<sup>93</sup> He stated, "the gospel of our blessed Lord Jesus Christ is today suffering humiliation among us evangelicals by our conspicuous neglect of it."<sup>94</sup> This bears on the preacher who fills his sermons with practical helps spawned in anthropocentric interpretations. Theocentric preaching is not merely an alternative technique when one tires of "10 steps to whatever". Rather it is to engage the text in its true meaning by allowing the author's original intent to rule the interpretation. In this context only sermons that are Christ-centered will give proper honor to the gospel. In observing a positive trend in preaching Rowell has registered increased attention to theology. "For most of a decade, the "how-to" message has been touted as the

---

<sup>92</sup> Hauerwas, "Preaching as Though We had Enemies", 46.

<sup>93</sup> Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. *A Passion for God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 208.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

way to reclaim congregational interest. . . . Yet, by focusing exclusively on the practical side of the continuum, some preachers now feel their congregations have lost touch with the eternal issues of Scripture. . . . Response to these concerns has caused a strong trend back to theological and doctrinal sermons."<sup>95</sup> This development is welcomed by those who preach from a theocentric perspective. Orlund added urgency to encouragement when he counseled, "*Rather than carelessly assume the gospel we must aggressively, deliberately, fully and passionately teach and preach the gospel.*"<sup>96</sup>

The high call of preaching is matched by its high purpose as expressed by Pitt-Watson. "The Word of God comes to us in three ways: first in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh; second, in the written Word of Scripture as contained in the Old and New Testaments, but third (and this is the divine-crazy absurdity), in the Word preached."<sup>97</sup> Implying a theocentric perspective he also stated, "What is preaching? It is proclamation, not just moralizing. It is Good News, not just good advice; it is gospel, not just law. Supremely, it is about God and what he has done, not just about us and about what we ought to do."<sup>98</sup>

The importance of preaching is reinforced by others, including Tuck who stated, "The audacity of preaching is rooted in the boldness of Jesus himself, carried forward by the Gospel and Pauline traditions and espoused by many theologians."<sup>99</sup> Robert Jensen described the sermon as speaking for God, emphasizing the sacramental nature of

---

<sup>95</sup> Ed Rowell, "Where Preaching is Headed", *Leadership* 18 (Winter 1997), 98

<sup>96</sup> Orlund, 207.

<sup>97</sup> Ian Pitt-Watson, *A Primer for Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 14.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>99</sup> William P. Tuck, "Toward a Theology of the Proclaimed Word", *Review and Expositor* 81 (Spring 1984), 291-305.

preaching (God speaking in the sermon) and its present tense proclamation, rather than speaking in past or timeless terms about God.<sup>100</sup> Buttrick has noted of preachers, "We have been *chosen* to speak God's own Word. No wonder, year in, year out, preaching is terror and gladness."<sup>101</sup> Schaibley distinguished proclamation from communication. Since the sermon is spoken and not written, it is well suited to proclaim guilt and forgiveness. The gospel, not what people want to hear, predominates.<sup>102</sup>

Lloyd-Jones confirmed this high view of preaching when he wrote, "to me the work of preaching is the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called."<sup>103</sup> He assessed conditions when he added, "I would say without any hesitation that the most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching."<sup>104</sup> This august perspective, however, is not embraced by all. Barlow has criticized the authoritarian nature of preaching for being a one-way process that engenders passivity and dependence. He called preaching into question in light of the elements of communication.<sup>105</sup> Voster, from another continent, registered his view of the crisis when he asked, Is the preacher really able to reach modern man and is the monological nature of preaching still valid in a modern world?<sup>106</sup> Reacting to the strong shift toward story-telling, however, Willimon contended that narrative emphasis is an accommodation to television

---

<sup>100</sup> Robert A. Jensen, "Speaking for God...Speaking for Others", *Dialog* 34 (1995), 167-172.

<sup>101</sup> David G. Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 459.

<sup>102</sup> Robert W. Schaibley, "Lutheran Preaching", *Concordia Journal* 18 (1992), 6-27.

<sup>103</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 9.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> William Barlow, "Communicating the Gospel", *Searching Together* 21 (1993), 45-61.

<sup>106</sup> J. M. Voster, "Renewal in Preaching", *In Die Skriflig* 29 (1995), 443-466.

attention spans. He critiqued the perspective that says people want "once upon a time", instead of "thus saith the Lord".<sup>107</sup> Certainly as a friend of preaching, Green found five reasons for the low state of preaching: (1) collapse of belief; (2) revolution in communication; (3) rejection of authority; (4) growth of relativism; (5) change in priority. He maintained, however, that effective preaching is possible for those who believe in it, trust the Scriptures, act as ambassadors for Christ and engage in bridge building.<sup>108</sup> The Scriptures are trustworthy as Maier defended, "If one is to treat the concept of the sovereignty of God seriously, then it would have to be a trait of this sovereignty to reveal itself whenever and wherever He should wish to do so."<sup>109</sup>

Presently, preaching has its supporters and detractors, even among the exclusive company of homileticians. This has been confirmed and substantiated by the foregoing literature review. The final focus of this section on Homiletics will consider recent writing on the more specific subject of preaching from a theocentric perspective. Sager has suggested sermon preparation be viewed as a process that entails the interplay of three living realities; the Word, the congregation and the preacher.<sup>110</sup> This useful observation makes the preacher aware of all that he must consider. Keeping each element in proper balance is the goal of theocentric preaching. As Dreyer noted, the anthropocentric problem of moralism is still alive in modern preaching. Moralism arises when imperatives are presented in a legalistic manner. To prevent this Dreyer advised engaging first the

---

<sup>107</sup> William Willimon, "Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?", *Christian Century* 28 (February 1990), 204-206.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Green, "Effective Preaching", *Asbury Seminarian* 39 (1984), 3-15.

<sup>109</sup> Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974), 52.

<sup>110</sup> Allan H. Sager, "Preaching and Hermeneutics", *Trinity Seminary Bulletin* 2 (Spring 1980), 19.

theological indicatives and promises of God which lead the believer to try to achieve the imperative.<sup>111</sup>

Theocentric preaching is predicated on discovering the divine initiative and activity in the text. Carson identifies the alternatives, "Instead of coming to Abraham or David and doing one of those 'Persons of the Bible' series in which we say, 'Here David was a good man, let's be good, here David was a bad man, let's not be bad': little moralisms for the people of God. We tie these things instead to the grand themes of Scripture that bring us to the New Covenant and to the Savior, the Mediator of the New Covenant."<sup>112</sup> To insure that larger themes are engaged James Dennison provided a two- fold model based on the understanding that the biblical-theological sermon is integrative. It pulls together text and context: (1) the text in its immediate context; (2) the text in its redemptive-historical context.<sup>113</sup>

Theocentric preaching is not the sole franchise of Reformed preachers, but the Reformation is more responsible than any other movement for establishing theocentricity. The Reformation brought radical change to preaching in the theological content of sermons rather than in sermon form. Fickenscher catalogued the contributions of the Reformation to preaching:

the sermon as proclamation of the Word of God is a means of grace,  
the sermon proclaimed the certainty of salvation,  
the sermon's source of authority was Scripture,  
the sermon was expository, that is the interpretation of a Scripture text,  
the sermon's content is God's grace revealed in Christ's passion and resurrection,  
the sermon made a clear distinction between the law and gospel,

---

<sup>111</sup> T. F. J. Dreyer, "The Kerygmatic Structure as a Method in Eliminating Moralism in Preaching", *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 50 (1994), 281-295.

<sup>112</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Primacy of Expository Preaching*, 2.

<sup>113</sup> James T. Dennison, "Building the Biblical-Theological Sermon, Part II", *Kerux* 5 (1990), 32-46.

the sermon is a relationship between the preacher and his hearers.<sup>114</sup>

Reviewing Leith's discussion on Calvin's doctrine of proclamation reveals similar points. In particular Leith stated, "Calvin thought of proclamation as the primary means by which God's presence becomes actual to us and by which God's work is accomplished in the individual life and in the community."<sup>115</sup> The validity of preaching, in Calvin's view, does not depend upon the response it elicits. It is a witness or testimony that God wills to be made in his world even if all reject it.<sup>116</sup> This certainly presents theocentric perspective

In his "Meditations on Expository Exultation," Piper also has expressed his theocentric or God-centered position. He cited three reasons why preaching was meant to be and to kindle God-exalting worship: (1) because the Word of God says everything is to be done in a worshipful God-centered way; (2) because the Word says that God exalts his own centrality in all that he does; and (3) because the New Testament teaches that the appointed end of preaching is faith, the primary covenant requirement of God because it humbles us and amplifies the trustworthiness of God.<sup>117</sup>

A review of the current literature demonstrates that theocentric preaching is not a novel or new idea. Rather it has been shown to be rooted in the Reformation and to be congruent with the approach of many scholars and practitioners, whether or not the term theocentric appears in their writings. If, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, theocentric or Christocentric interpretation is valid it is because it best represents the true meaning and

---

<sup>114</sup> Carl C. Fickenscher, "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching", *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 58 (1994), 255-282.

<sup>115</sup> John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word", *Review and Expositor* 86 (Winter 1989), 29.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>117</sup> Piper, "Preaching as Worship: Meditations on Expository Exultation", 1.4

intent of the biblical text. Because a preaching text is not to be treated in an isolated or atomistic manner, but studied in light of immediate context and its place in the canon it is important to employ theological tools. Theology, therefore, is an essential component in the hermeneutical and homiletical processes. Some would object to the influence of a theological interpretation, deeming it to be an intrusion that turns the timely sermon into an abstract lecture. Such concerns are not entirely unwarranted, therefore the next section will directly address the issue of relevance as it has been discussed in current literature

## RELEVANCE IN THEOCENTRIC PREACHING

Relevance is a concern of effective preachers, theocentric ones included. Few people will attend to what they consider unnecessary. Perceiving this, Miller anticipated the congregational question, "Why should I listen?"<sup>118</sup> He continued, "This struggle to relate the Bible to life is called relevance. The issue of content in our preaching must deal with one question: Can they reach it?"<sup>119</sup> The desire to put the sermon within reach must not, however, be allowed to "overreach".

Unless preachers understand the basis for relevant sermons their striving may distort the text. Sproul acknowledged this concern when he said, "I had an astute theological observer say to me that the new move toward liberalism and unbelief will not come through defections in theology but it will be carried by methodology, by this burning desire to be relevant."<sup>120</sup> Mayhue has stated that too much concern for personal relevance, over God's revelation, tarnishes biblical preaching's authenticity. Scripture requires a

---

<sup>118</sup> Calvin Miller, *The Empowered Communicator* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), xx.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>120</sup> Sproul, "Theology and Preaching in the 90's", *Preaching*, 22.

proclamation focused on God's will and mankind's obligation to obey.<sup>121</sup> In his passionate call to recover the gospel Ortlund asked the question, "O desolate evangelicalism, what do you mean by your stylish fads and restless search for ever new 'relevance'?"<sup>122</sup> Hannah noting this distorted exercise in relevance said, "In the quest to make the modern church more important to society, the church is finding itself less appealing to an increasingly apathetic world because it has little to offer that is distinctive. Our growing accommodation of the gospel message to immediate, felt needs, with the hope of attracting the less interested, may well cause the church to forget that its true work is about an indescribable miracle of God's grace."<sup>123</sup> Relevance, it becomes apparent, must be balanced with reverence.

True reverence is expressed in submission to and proclamation of the Bible's message. That message is free to speak to people today without dilution or distortion. Fee and Stuart declared, "Because the Bible is *God's Word*, it has *eternal relevance*; it speaks to all humankind, in every age and in every culture. Because it is God's Word, we must listen--and obey."<sup>124</sup> This eternal relevance does not disregard the need for careful use of hermeneutics, as Fee and Stuart have pointed out, "But, because God chose to speak his Word through *human words in history*, every book in the Bible also has *historical particularity*. . . . Interpretation of the Bible is demanded by the 'tension' that exists between its *eternal relevance* and its *historical particularity*."<sup>125</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Richard L. Mayhue, "Rediscovering Expository Preaching", *Master's Seminary Journal* 1 (1990), 109-127.

<sup>122</sup> Ortlund, *A Passion for God*, 209.

<sup>123</sup> John D. Hannah, "Evangelicalism: Have We Sold Our Heritage for Relevance?", *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, ed. John H. Armstrong (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 168.

<sup>124</sup> Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 17.

"Without genuine relevance there is no sermon", so stated Greidanus.<sup>126</sup> It is evident that relevance isn't optional. The preacher who fails to communicate relevantly betrays not just his congregation, leaving them with only a history lesson, but also the Scripture which by its nature is relevant. But it is not the preacher's task to make a text relevant. Greidanus has helpfully explained, "The point is that biblical texts are God's word *addressed* to his people and, therefore, already applied and relevant. Hence preachers today need not transform an objective entity into a relevant word but need only transmit a relevant message from the past to the present."<sup>127</sup>

Accurate interpretation is necessary, therefore, in order to bring the original intention of the ancient author into the lives of the modern listener. Osborne has stated, "The hermeneutical process culminates not in the results of exegesis (centering on the original meaning of the text) but in the homiletical process (centering on the significance of the Word for the life of the Christian today)."<sup>128</sup> Recognizing the close connection of relevance and application Klein, Hubbard and Blomberg offered assistance in bringing the original message into today's sermon. "In this step the interpreter asks questions such as: What did the biblical author of a given passage want his hearers or readers to do? What was the intended response to the text? . . . Is there a command to obey, an example to follow or to avoid, a promise to claim, a warning to heed, a teaching to act on, . . . a truth to believe?"<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 157.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>128</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 343.

<sup>129</sup> William W. Klein, Robert L. Hubbard, and Craig L. Blomberg, *Introduction to*

The relevance of the text, rightly transmitted, assures the relevance of the sermon. The sermon that is theocentric--centered on the revelation and participation of God--can bring a message that is timely and timeless. To be timeless doesn't mean a sermon that is atemporal, in the sense that it is abstract and unrelated to life. The pressure to be relevant has pushed many sermons to become anthropocentric, focusing on the people in the text, in an attempt to be timely. This is an unfortunate, if not uncommon, mistake which is addressed by Greidanus, "But if the author did not intend his hearers to identify with a specific character, there seems to be little justification for contemporary preachers to do so--let alone using that character as an example of what to do or not to do. The relevance of the Bible is found first and foremost not in what the biblical characters are doing but in what God in Christ is doing for his people."<sup>130</sup> Greidanus commended the emerging literary approach to studying the Bible because it "enhances relevance with its emphasis on the *whole* story. The whole story is the story of God's involvement with our world from the beginning of time to its end."<sup>131</sup> Underscoring the theocentric perspective Greidanus concluded, "This universal history is the history of God's coming kingdom. Since every biblical text is part of this kingdom history, every biblical text is relevant for the church that works and waits for the kingdom of God."<sup>132</sup>

The evangelical who has found repose in the veracity of Scripture can also rest secure in its relevance. But, as the literature surveyed has stated, that relevance is not without its rigors. How to bring the eternally relevant revelation into the temporal sermon

---

*Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 407-408.

<sup>130</sup> Sidney Greidanus, "Preaching and the New Literary Studies of the Bible", *Calvin Theological Journal* 28 (1993), 129.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

requires work. Kaiser has determined it is a job many preachers have not been well equipped to do. "A gap of crisis proportions exists between the steps generally outlined in most seminary or Biblical training classes in exegesis and the hard realities most pastors face every week as they prepare their sermons. Nowhere in the total curriculum of theological studies has the student been more deserted and left to his own devices than in bridging the yawning chasm between understanding the content of Scripture as it was given in the past and in proclaiming it with such relevance in the present as to produce faith, life, and bona fide works."<sup>133</sup>

Carson has said, "Half of sermon preparation time must go into how to make these truths real, living, edifying, rebuking, biting, healing at the concrete level in the lives of their people. It requires imagination, thought, compassion and reflective praying over your congregation's lives, there is no short cut, none. The preacher's job is not only to proclaim the Word but to make it bite; to wound and to heal, to make it sing and sting."<sup>134</sup>

Willhite has explained that homileticians must give attention to audience receptivity and must establish a link between interpretation and application.<sup>135</sup> Warren has contributed to this discussion also. "God's authoritative Word must be presented in ways relevant to the hearers in their own context. . . .Preachers must ask, 'What about this audience demands a different presentation than any other audience?'"<sup>136</sup> Aware of the danger of allowing audience analysis to influence the exegesis and/or theology of the passage, Warren recommended following three separate, sequential steps. "They are exegesis followed by

---

<sup>133</sup> Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 18.

<sup>134</sup> Carson, *The Primacy of Expository Preaching*, 3.

<sup>135</sup> Keith Willhite, "Audience Relevance in Expository Preaching", *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992), 355-369.

<sup>136</sup> Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching", *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 467.

theology, followed by homiletics."<sup>137</sup>

Miller added to the discussion on relevance when he stated, "Sermons have no relevance until the listener can apply them to life."<sup>138</sup> He further clarified, "Relevance precedes application. People only apply sermons that have clear meaning for their lives."<sup>139</sup> Miller served the preacher and listener by describing a concept he called the promise. "Relevance is a real issue of preaching. Relevant content is so hard to find in most public speeches these days that the Promise--the promise to give hearers usable information and to keep your promise in the sermon's content--always needs to be made."<sup>140</sup>

Adams addressed the supposed conflict between doctrine and application when he explained that doctrine was given for practical purposes, "It is truth applied". Citing Paul's practice in Philippians 2, Adams has noted, "He wanted doctrine to humble, shame, and guide them, bringing them to repentance and newness of life in Christ. Application brings Christ into the center of a message as the One who makes the difference in life."<sup>141</sup>

This section has surveyed the literature pertaining to relevance. It has been shown that relevance is not incompatible with theology in general or theocentric interpretation in particular. Furthermore, the relevancy of the sermon was not contingent upon clever homiletics but faithful hermeneutics. The Scriptures bear the eternal relevance of their divine author. Careful students of the Bible have observed God's character and activity revealed in the text and understand that relevant sermons are derived by reflecting his

---

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 469.

<sup>138</sup> Miller, *The Empowered Communicator*, 94.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>140</sup> Calvin Miller, "Putting the Promise in Your Preaching", *Preaching* 10 (July-August 1994), 2.

<sup>141</sup> Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 41.

continuing redemptive work in ways that are applicable and accessible to their hearers.

## **SUMMARY**

In an effort to gain a broader understanding of the issues related to theocentric preaching this research project has surveyed the current literature. It began by looking at the topic of theology as it relates to hermeneutics and homiletics. With this background a thorough search was conducted on the current applications of the key term "theocentric". The evidence for theocentric perspective in evangelical theology and preaching was given closer examination. Because theocentric preaching involves hermeneutics (interpretation of texts) and homiletics (preparation and presentation of sermons), each discipline was surveyed. Finally, the issue of relevance was explored in the current literature.

## **SURVEY OF SEMINARY COURSE OFFERINGS RELATED TO THEOCENTRIC PREACHING**

Preaching is the primary work load of the pastor. Homiletics, however, is not the dominant course load of the seminarian. Personal experience recalls that a Master of Divinity student could graduate having only preached two 12 minute messages in his three year preparation for a 52 week-a-year responsibility. Times have changed in 20 years, in this case for the better. Now students encounter more required homiletics courses and supplemental preaching labs with the benefit (?) of peer feedback and that video reality check.

What has happened to the course content in this practical theology curriculum? A survey of 21 seminaries in the United States reveals three interesting findings for this project in general and this thesis in particular. First, it is apparent that many seminaries are taking seriously their preparation of new preachers by offering the basic preaching class in not one but two semesters. In some cases the initial prerequisite course is theoretical and academic only.

A second observation is the variety of courses offered beyond the minimum requirement. This is encouraging because seminary faculties have been characterized as jealous of their "turf" and reluctant to permit expansion of departments that aren't intensively biblical or theological. These advanced courses range from the history of preaching to the issues of audience awareness and relevance.

The third discovery pertains to the topic of this writer: theocentric preaching. If one were to expand the parameters to include upper-level courses such as "Preaching and

Theology" or "Doctrinal Preaching", we could identify seven schools offering such classes.<sup>1</sup> One-third of these schools, therefore, are actively engaging the integration of theology and preaching, albeit in some cases, only for Doctor of Ministry students.

Closer to the target are the offerings of four other seminaries that address Christological, or Theocentric/Christocentric Preaching, specifically. Three schools have Reformed theology as their basic tenets. First, however, is the sole Wesleyian school, *Asbury Theological Seminary*, offering a pertinent class; "Christology for Preaching". The catalogue course description explains that this course focuses upon the biblical and theological understanding of the person and work of Christ as it relates to ministry. Special attention is given to preaching Christ in relation to the seasons of the church year. The course is designed to enhance the biblical-theological content of preaching and enable effective doctrinal preaching.

*Covenant Theological Seminary* provides the course "Christ-centered Preaching". This may be both an expected and an exceptional offering with author of *Christ-centered Preaching*, Bryan Chapell on the faculty. The course is announced as a preaching practicum with special emphasis on the place and uniqueness of the atonement in Christian preaching.

*Westminster Theological Seminary* lists the course, "Christ in the Old Testament". This trademark offering is presented by Edmund Clowney, whose reputation and deserved respect commend him to the topic and the students.

---

<sup>1</sup> Andover-Newton, Candler School of Theology, Claremont, Dallas Theological Seminary, Denver Seminary, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary-Louisville.

Sidney Greidanus, professor at *Calvin Theological Seminary*, teaches both basic and advanced preaching classes. His specialty is entitled, "Christocentric Preaching from the Old Testament." The course deals with issues such as theocentric/Christocentric preaching and the hermeneutical and homiletical issues involved in using Old Testament passages for Christian proclamation. Students are required to develop sermon outlines from different biblical literature. Of all the courses described, this one gives indication of being most profitable and compatible with this thesis and the curriculum that follows in chapter four.

It could be concluded that most seminaries surveyed take the task of preaching seriously. This purposeful approach is measured not so much by upper level classes in communication theory and technique as by attending to the theology and history of preaching. Certainly proficiency in the pulpit is partially an acquired skill. But the best of seminary courses do not assume that style supersedes substance. For this reason, it is encouraging to observe several attempts to impress upon students the God-centered nature of the preaching responsibility.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE COURSE IN THEOCENTRIC PREACHING**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The biblical and theological foundation for theocentric preaching was laid down in chapter two. Chapter three reviewed the current literature pertaining to this same thesis. It is the purpose of this chapter to provide the preacher and/or teacher with a curriculum that can be used for personal study or the training of others in theocentric preaching.

#### **COURSE SYLLABUS**

##### **I. COURSE NOTES TO THE TEACHER:**

What follows is a complete description of the course and the lesson plans for the proposed six sessions. Everything needed to conduct a seminar on theocentric preaching is provided for the potential teacher. This includes recommended resources, suggestions for methodology and outline of topics presented. A pre-assessment instrument for measuring the entry level of understanding can also serve to identify any areas needing special attention. The post-assessment exercise allows the teacher to determine the change of comprehension and behavior achieved as an outcome of the course.

It is hoped that many who have not had formal training as teachers will be inclined to teach this and other helpful courses. To equip the potential teacher and provide more useful information on designing courses and preparing instructional objectives these briefly noted resources which follow are recommended (see bibliography for full references):

*The Systematic Design for Instruction*, by Dick and Carey, plots in several steps the development of an instructional program starting with identifying the instructional goal(s). This process includes developing objectives, strategy, materials and evaluation. This very thorough text may give more detail than desired but the components of learning are well ordered.

*Preparing Instructional Objectives*, by Mager, emphasizes that before the instructor selects procedures or subject matter or materials, it is important to state clearly just what he intends the results of that instruction to be. This clear objective is the basis for choosing methods and materials. It is significant to note that objectives have to do with results not process, therefore they are measurable and written to describe something the student is to do, not just know.

*Learning and Instructional Design*, by Buzzell, is a set of notes that usefully explains what learning actually is and how to design effective learning materials. Learning is defined as change resulting from meaningful interaction with one's environment. Six levels of learning are delineated including: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The paper also discusses the means of attaining clarity of outcome by writing effective instructional goals.

*The Adult Learner*, by Knowles, identifies the learning assumptions that apply to adults. In comparison to pedagogy, andragogy (or adult learning) recognizes the following distinctions: (1) need to know - raising awareness of why the adult needs to learn increases the learner's initiative; (2) self concept - being responsible for their own decisions learners are capable of self direction; (3) role of experience - approaching the educational

activity with a greater range of experience the learner can relate this to previous learning; (4) readiness to learn - becoming ready to learn what the adult learner perceives is useful and doable; (5) orientation to learning - placing the lesson in the context of real life situations or problem solving; (6) motivation - recognizing that the most potent motivators are internal pressures including satisfaction. In summary, the adult learner values involvement in shaping the learning experience and gaining useful information or skills.

## **II. COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course entitled "Theocentric Preaching" is designed to identify the reasons for preparing sermons that are God-centered or theocentric. It will clarify the key issues as well as the alternative to theocentric interpretation. Biblical and theological support for this approach to preaching will be presented along with confirmation from many current authors. The perceptions that suppose theocentric preaching to be impractical or irrelevant will be addressed. A theocentric template that can be applied in the hermeneutical and homiletical study of biblical passages will also be introduced.

## **III. COURSE OBJECTIVES**

It is the *goal* of this course that the learner demonstrates understanding of the principles of theocentric preaching. The *objectives* supporting this goal are as follows:

- (1) The learner will describe the role of theology in preaching.
- (2) The learner will summarize beneficial and detrimental uses of theocentric.
- (3) The learner will explain hermeneutical principles of "theocentric" preaching.

- (4) The learner will identify homiletical characteristics of theocentric preaching.**
- (5) The learner will defend the relevancy of theocentric preaching.**
- (6) The learner will demonstrate the application of theocentric interpretation.**

#### **IV. COURSE TEXTBOOKS**

**Because of the seminar format nature of this course extensive reading will not be required. Certain texts are, however, highly recommended both as preparation for the seminar and as supplement to the seminar. The books or selected portions are as follows:**

*Christ-centered Preaching* by Chapell; chapters 10 & 11.

*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* by Greidanus; chapters 5 & 8.

*The Preacher and Preaching* by Logan, ed.; Introduction & chapter 6.

*The Supremacy of God in Preaching* by Piper.

*Between Two Worlds* by Stott; chapter 3.

#### **V. COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

**The requirements or expectations for this in-context training are full participation in all the sessions and application of the principles in preparation of an expository sermon.**

#### **VI. COURSE EVALUATION**

**Students in the seminar will participate in an initial assessment measuring their acquaintance with key concepts and current engagement of theocentric practices. A closing assessment will measure the comprehension of course content.**

## **VII. COURSE METHODOLOGY**

**A variety of methods will be employed to enhance learning including lecture, class discussion, overhead projections, printed handouts, class exercises, and sermon evaluation.**

## **VIII. COURSE OUTLINE**

**This course shall consist of six sessions each lasting 90 minutes. Approximately half of each class will be given to introducing material pertinent to the lesson goal. The latter half of the session will involve discussion and interaction around the concepts and issues introduced. The six lessons are as follows:**

- (1) Course Introduction & Theology in Preaching**
- (2) Theocentric Perspectives: Deriving a Definition for Preaching**
- (3) Hermeneutics in Theocentric Preaching**
- (4) Homiletics in Theocentric Preaching**
- (5) Relevance in Theocentric Preaching**
- (6) Testing of the Theocentric Template**

***Ideas for expanding the subject matter:* When the teaching opportunity offers extended time the course could profitably be extended by two additions. First, the student could preach a theocentric sermon he had prepared as a result of the course work. Second, several Bible passages could be explored from a theocentric perspective, including some narrative passages which often receive an anthropocentric interpretation. Possible passages include: Genesis 39 - Joseph in Potiphar's house; 1 Samuel 19,20 - Friendship of David and Jonathan; 1 Kings 19 - Elijah after Mt. Carmel; Hebrews 11 - heroes of faith.**

# **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

**LESSON PLAN**

**SESSION # 1**

## **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

The student will describe the role of theology in preaching

## **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1 - The student will distinguish God's revelation from all other communication.
- 2 - The student will relate the ways theology improves preaching.
- 3- The student will explain the Holy Spirit's role in theology and preaching..

## **LECTURE:**

Content for lecture can be found in ch. 2, pages 8-16, 28-30; ch. 3 pages 37-44.

## **EXERCISE:**

See pages listed above.

**CONCEPTS:** Revelation, Proclamation

**RESOURCES:** Pre-course assessment instrument.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** Read *Preacher and Preaching*, Intro. & *Between Two Worlds*, ch. 3.

## **PRE-COURSE ASSESSMENT**

**(Use at opening of session #1)**

As we begin this seminar on theocentric preaching it will be helpful and revealing to assess our present understanding and practice. Please offer candid and complete responses. This review is for your personal benefit and does not need to be presented to the class.

**1) Assign a percentage to indicate how often you preach from each testament.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Old Testament

\_\_\_\_\_ New Testament

**(For this question, both answers should total 100 %.)**

**2) Of your Old Testament sermons how often do you preach from each genre?**

\_\_\_\_\_ Narrative

\_\_\_\_\_ Poetry

\_\_\_\_\_ Prophecy

\_\_\_\_\_ Wisdom

**(For this question, all categories should total 100%.)**

**3) What is your position on preaching series focused on Bible characters? (check one)**

\_\_\_\_\_ I do so regularly believing it is a valid form of exposition.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do so occasionally seeing it as a minor emphasis.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do so rarely preferring to engage in other forms of exposition.

**4) Please write a brief description of the distinguishing traits of theocentric preaching.**

**5) What are the alternatives to theocentric preaching that are prevalent today?**

**6) How do you insure the relevance of your sermon?**

## **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

### **LESSON PLAN**

### **SESSION # 2**

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

The student will summarize the beneficial and detrimental uses of "theocentric".

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1 - The student will list four ways the term "theocentric" is used today.
- 2 - The student will explain "theocentric" in relation to preaching.

#### **LECTURE:**

Content for lecture can be found in ch. 2, pages 28-35; ch. 3, pages 44-58.

#### **EXERCISE:**

See pages listed above.

**CONCEPTS:** Theocentric, Anthropocentric, Polemic

**RESOURCES:** Objections and Obstacles to Theocentric Preaching - handout

**ASSIGNMENTS:** Read *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, chapter 5.

## **OBJECTIONS & OBSTACLES TO THEOCENTRIC PREACHING**

Theocentric preaching is not understood or embraced by all. There are several reasons for this. It is the purpose of this reference page is to catalogue some observations on why preaching fails to hold the theocentric viewpoint. (Full references in bibliography.)

### **OBJECTIONS**

- 1) Flowing from faulty hermeneutics, the text is interpreted by psychologizing, moralizing, spiritualizing, or typologizing. (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, p. 73-83).
- 2) Failure to distinguish between the ingredients of the text and the intention of the text. (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, p. 119).
- 3) Focus on wrong orientations: subjectivism (my experience), spiritualism (inner life), individualism (no covenant). (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, p. 33).

### **OBSTACLES**

- 1) Using biblical theology to assist in theocentric interpretation is hard work. It requires a growing familiarity with the whole Bible, not just the portion being preached. (Clowney, *Biblical Preaching*, p.112).
- 2) It is tempting to mute the theocentric/Christocentric focus in order to avoid the offense of the gospel which leads to suffering, rejection. (Stott, *Guard the Gospel*, p. 43).
- 3) People, preachers included, are not moved by the grandeur of God as much as urgent issues and congregational needs. (Piper, *Preaching as Worship* #1, p. 3).
- 4) Theology is boring, sermons filled with theology will be irrelevant, dead dog-matics. (Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura*, p.35).

## **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

**LESSON PLAN**

**SESSION # 3**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

**The student will explain the principles of hermeneutics in theocentric preaching.**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1 - The student will differentiate between biblical and postmodern hermeneutics.**
- 2 - The student will describe the relationship of hermeneutics to homiletics.**
- 3 - The student will explain the unified and progressive nature of Scripture.**

### **LECTURE:**

**Content for lecture can be found in ch. 2, pages 19-24, 31-33; ch. 3, pages 59-65.**

### **EXERCISE:**

**See pages listed above.**

**CONCEPTS:** "Hermeneutics predisposes homiletics"; Redemptive History

**RESOURCES:** Popular commentaries on Nehemiah.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** Read *Christ-centered Preaching*, chapters 10-11.

# **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

## **LESSON PLAN**

## **SESSION # 4**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

**The student will identify the homiletical characteristics of theocentric preaching.**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1 - The student will list four characteristics of the Scriptures we preach.**
- 2 - The student will identify benefits to the congregation of theocentric preaching.**
- 3- The student will appraise the sample sermon for its theocentric character.**

### **LECTURE:**

**Content for the lecture can be found in ch. 2, pages 13-27 ; ch. 3, pages 65-71.**

### **EXERCISE:**

**See pages listed above.**

**CONCEPTS: Christocentric**

**RESOURCES: Sample sermon based on Mark 4:35-41**

**ASSIGNMENTS: Read *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*.**

## **SAMPLE SERMON from Mark 4:35-41**

**(Use with session #4)**

***"What to Do with Your Doubts"* by James M. Anderson**

**"A crisis situation can be the double digit inflation that erodes the face value of our faith."**

Bouncing over the choppy waves the speed boat took a sharp turn and pitched two people over the side. One was a woman who could not swim, the other, a fifty year old man. Quickly he responded to her plight and, treading water, held her head above the cold lake waters until the boat could return for them. As the woman was pulled to safety, the man was pulled under from exhaustion. Every effort to rescue him failed.

The Bible conference grounds at Schroon Lake where the tragedy took place was stunned. The man who drowned was a Christian leader with a world-wide reputation. The compelling vision of this man had matured over 20 years of dynamic ministry. As the founder and president of the Navigators, Dawson Trotman was used by God to build a program to disciple sailors into a ministry that was impacting soldiers and citizens, military and churches. His stature was measured in terms of a century.

And beneath the waves sank this visionary and the hearts of hundreds who he had deeply touched. One of this closest friends and co-laborers was Lorne Sanny. At a meeting of his shocked co-workers Sanny held up his Bible and asked, "You still believe this is true?"

**Have you ever been shaken by a situation or infected by a fear that caused you to wonder: Is this Christianity just wishful thinking?**

- when someone you looked up to abandons the faith he or she helped to foster in you?**
- when God seems to ignore your pleading prayers on behalf of someone else and they suffer more, or die?**
- when the gospel seems to be losing its grip? As Os Guinness has noted "the three strongest national challenges to the gospel in the modern world are Japan, Europe and the United States. Japan has never been won to Christ; Europe has been won twice and lost twice; and America, though having the strongest and wealthiest churches, is now experiencing the most severe crisis."**

**Are you ever troubled about the veracity or the tenacity of your faith? In the face of crises that set siege ramps around the citadel of faith, have you asked; Is it really true? What if everything I have believed is false? A crisis can be like kryptonite to the soul.**

**Where does your faith find its security? its validity? Is what we believe merely for the naive? These are not questions that occur in the sunlight of happy circumstances. They emerge like vermin in the dark night of the soul. What do you do if it isn't true? Where does your faith find its validity?**

**If you've known doubts, if you've spent time on the sloping back of a question mark, or if you know someone who has struggled, there are some people I'd like you to**

meet. These nagging issues are not necessarily new. They like you, in a crisis questioned if they had put their eggs in the wrong basket. These men had reason to wonder about the competence of the Creator.

Come, let's get into the boat with a bunch of guys who wrestled with , Why would God allow this if He really was in charge? Where does our faith find its validity?

<Read passage: Mark 4:35-54>

Before we unfurl this passage we would do well to consider the context. Too often we focus on one incident and ignore the clues that are all around it. We are susceptible to sliding into the wrong interpretation without the context.

To study Mark's arrangement, this story introduced actions of Jesus, covering the four classic categories of miracle; over nature, and in chapter 5: over demons, sickness and death.

But this thematic connection is preceded by a chronological sequence of significance. Note verse 35--"that day when evening came". . . From the start of chapter 4 are recorded parables which Jesus taught to large crowds and explained to his disciples. These parables have a decidedly positive tone as he instructs them about the kingdom of God -- bringing forth much fruit, growing independently of human effort, having great results from small, humble beginnings.

Designed to raise the disciples' morale, these positive parables present that prevailing power of God's kingdom. That Christ was in charge of the curriculum is obvious. What I want you to look for is a thread that runs throughout this chapter. For the question has not yet occurred to the 12.; where does faith find its validity?

**Much the same as us--questions only occur when a time of calm is crushed by the tonnage of some tragedy. Likewise, the disciples are about to step into a stress test. The pop quiz of the tempest will determine if they are paying any attention.**

**To frame the question that comes upon them, and us, is crisis, What do we do if it isn't? Where do we go to find out if it is really so? Where does our faith find its validity?**

**Turning your attention to v.36 let me point out how this passage bears the presence of an eyewitness. Several details reveal the impressions of Peter's personal experience as recorded by Mark. This incident resonates with the truthfulness of Peter who said in this second epistle: "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty." (2 Peter 1:16)**

**Verse 36 -- Jesus is directing traffic. He is in control as he steps from the bow where he'd been teaching, toward the stern where he'd soon be sleeping. Have you matured to the point where you realize keeping close company with Christ doesn't exempt you from personal problems? I think I have, yet there are times when I would like to use the diplomatic immunity as Jesus would slip me into the pouch of his divinity. It is an important principle to come to terms with, especially when your flight plan hits turbulence. Say at 4:31 am when your house starts to shake or the best played prayers come out like the Buffalo Bills--overrun by the circumstantial Dallas Cowboys. Or when the sea turns from a sleeping dog into a menacing mongrel....**

The sea or lake of Galilee sits like a basin surrounded by high hills - a wind sweeping down on the lake will create a sudden, severe squall. Soaked to the skin the disciples find they are losing the fight with a frenzied sea. The boat is taking on water and they are taking on fear.

What does a crisis in life expose? The depth of our confidence. Our confidence in God and in His kingdom is surfaced when a storm stirs our souls. . . .and awakens the specter: where does my faith find its source of security?

All this time Jesus--despite the appearances--remains in control. How can he be sleeping? I confess I wondered if it was the one-eye-open kind of sleep of a parent who is watching her children secretly. You know, stealing the chance to catch a candid glimpse of their real character. But no, he was really sleeping on the leather cushion or seat at the back of the boat. What a benign picture of control - calmness in crisis. How can we help others in trouble unless we come under the calming control of Christ?

How could Jesus sleep? they wondered. Rudely they awakened him. "Jesus, we're gonna die! The whole enterprise is in peril -- We are about to drown and the whole plan will go down! -- Don't you care? Our hopes - our dreams - our nation's salvation is going under! -- Don't you care?"

You cannot separate their personal concern from the catastrophic consequence of losing their leader and their life investment in his kingdom. Will it all be lost? Was it just misplaced trust? Where does faith find its validity?

**Jesus awoke and spoke. . .(pause). . .that was it. He just spoke. No frantic flailing arms, no lightning from fingertips, his word has power - "Quiet, be still" and like a well trained pet the wind and the sea were obedient to their master. They lay still at his feet.**

**Verse 40 - After rebuking the wind, Jesus rebuked his disciples. "Why are you so fearful? Do you still have no faith?" By now the cumulative effect of all they had witnessed could lead Jesus to expect more from them. The stress test exposed their failure to comprehend and apprehend who he was.**

**Why so timid? -- the word is imported by Paul (2 Timothy 1:7) when writing to the younger pastor, Timothy. "But God has not given us a spirit of fear - of timidity - a lack of moral courage that fails to do its duty. We stand in judgment of these drenched, doubting disciples until we see the state of our faith.. Is it full of power, full of love, full of self-discipline?**

**Crisis will cause us to question if faith indeed is real.**

**Crisis will create an opportunity for Christ to be revealed.**

**By Christ's words the sea is calm and the disciples are stirred up. They moved from fear to terror - verse 41. The wind and the waves - that power they understood, they had previous experience with that. But Christ! - power overcoming wind and waves - they had no preparation, no category for this kind of authority. Their teacher took on a new dimension - and he exceeded the scale of measurement.**

**Suppose you were to discover this morning that I had been given complete and absolute control over your careers today And future moves, promotion or demotions, would be by my decree. You would scour the past for any foolishness you had expressed.**

**You would monitor your conduct in my company because it was under the scrutiny of my authority. It would be to say the least, unsettling, unnerving.**

**From these Old Testament trained disciples the calming of the storm injected a disconcerting quality into their concept of Christ. Psalm 89:9 states it is the Lord God Almighty who calms seas and stills the waves. Suddenly a big equal sign flashes in their minds! Who is He. . . if the wind and the sea obey him, shouldn't we?**

**Allow me to draw together the things we have found - a thread runs through the entire passage. The one who was in charge of the curriculum - is the one who was in control of the boat - is the one who commanded the sea to be still. The thread of Jesus' authority runs throughout, but especially emerges in the overwhelming crisis of faith.**

**Where does faith find its source of security? Its veracity?**

**Where does faith find its validity?**

**IN THE ABIDING AND OVERRIDING AUTHORITY OF JESUS CHRIST. THE CRISIS OF FAITH CAN SERVE TO EXPOSE AND EXPAND OUR CONCEPT OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM.**

**Can it really be true? Will God's kingdom really come? What about the power of Satan, what about the prevalence of modernity?**

**The kingdom of God is like a seed. . . The number of Bible-believing Christians is increasing. From the time of Christ to the time of Columbus the number of Bible believing Christians grew to equal 1% of the population. From the time of Columbus to the Constitutional Convention it doubled to 2%. From the Constitutional Convention until we landed on the moon, the number of born-again believers expanded to equal 5% of the**

world's population. From 1970 till today the kingdom of God has doubled so that now 1 in 9 in the rapidly increasing population of the world is now a true believer in Jesus Christ.

The population grew from 400 million in Columbus day to nearly 6 billion today. But the rate of growth of the church outstrips the birthrate. 80,000 people come into a true relationship with Jesus Christ everyday.

Where does your faith find the proof of its validity? In the abiding and overriding authority of Jesus Christ. As you enter the kingdom of God by faith you find your security. This passage is NOT about the "storms of life" and how Jesus has guaranteed to calm them. It is NOT a "Jesus and me" Bible story.

Your security is under the authority of his Kingdom. Your privilege is to participate in his kingdom. The truth is, nothing can eclipse the kingdom of God. The purposes of God will prevail.

Not only is such an individualistic interpretation contrary to the teaching of this passage, the truth of the matter is, all our storms don't go away.

The fact is, not every storm settles down. Sometimes the boat sinks or the disciple drowns. After the drowning death of Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, his right hand man addressed his co-workers. "You believe this is still true?" Lorne Sanny did, so did Trotman's widow. So did those who had invested their lives in the cause of Christ.

The man of vision sank beneath the waves, but a new vision - one nurtured by Dawson and appointed by God, broke the surface. The priority of staff development emerged. Today the Navigators number nearly 400 missionaries and over 3000 staff members serving in 55 countries.

**When a man of God dies, nothing of God dies.**

**Yes, it is true. His Kingdom will come.**

**This train will come into the station.**

**This boat will reach the harbor.**

**The enterprise is not in jeopardy.**

**If you can't find the faith to believe it, realize you only can reject it by faith.**

**Either way we act by faith.**

**Where does faith find its validity?**

**IN THE ABIDING - throughout every circumstance and century.**

**IN THE OVERRIDING - conquering every power and principality.**

**AUTHORITY OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST!**

## **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

**LESSON PLAN**

**SESSION # 5**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

**The student will defend the relevance of theocentric preaching.**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

**1 - The student will discriminate between different attempts to be relevant.**

**2 - The student will explain the assured relevance of theocentric preaching.**

### **LECTURE:**

**Content for the lecture can be found in ch. 2, pages 22-26 ; ch. 3, pages 71-76.**

### **EXERCISE:**

**See pages listed above.**

**CONCEPTS: Relevance**

**RESOURCES: Tape #3 from D. A. Carson, "The Primacy of Expository Preaching"**

**ASSIGNMENTS: Read *Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, chapter 8.**

# **THEOCENTRIC PREACHING COURSE**

## **LESSON PLAN**

## **SESSION # 6**

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

**The student will demonstrate the application of theocentric template in sermons.**

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- 1- The student will use the theocentric template on a passage of Scripture.**
- 2- The student will identify the redemptive-historical elements of the passage.**

### **LECTURE:**

**Content for this lecture is a review of previous lectures.**

### **EXERCISE:**

**The exercise will be centered on the theocentric template provided in class.**

**CONCEPTS: Template**

**RESOURCES: Theocentric Template - handout; Post-course assessment instrument.**

**ASSIGNMENTS: Continue to integrate theocentric template into sermon preparation.**

## **THEOCENTRIC TEMPLATE**

(Use in conjunction with session #6)

The purpose of this reference page is to condense useful information from the seminar into a form that will serve the preacher in sermon preparation. This template is designed to be "laid alongside" the preaching passage in order to assure the preacher that he is engaging in a sound theological interpretation. In addition to grammatical and historical steps, these theocentric observations serve to guarantee accurate interpretation.

### **INTENTION**

Why did the author write this message? What is the purpose of this preaching portion? Why did God include this passage in His Word? How is the author's intention revealed by his selection and arrangement of biblical materials?

### **LARGER CONTEXT**

What is the text's place in redemptive history? How does it fit in the flow of God's saving purposes? What "brighter light" from the New Testament illumines the Old? What does the Old Testament passage point to in the New?

### **CHRISTOCENTRIC FOCUS**

How does this passage reveal Christ? What legitimate types are to be found? How does the passage connect to Christ (not only the incarnation, crucifixion or resurrection)? How does the overall all purpose of Scripture to glorify God find expression in this text?

### **INDICATIVES STATED OR IMPLIED**

What indicatives (statements of truth relating to God, his redemptive work, or the position of the believer) are behind the imperatives (calls to respond, believe, obey)?

## **POST-COURSE ASSESSMENT**

**(Use at conclusion of session #6)**

**In order to help determine the effectiveness of this class in orienting and educating you to theocentric preaching please respond. This is not a test to measure what you have learned. Rather this review may (1) clarify which topics need further information and (2) identify changes in understanding and practice that resulted for exposure to this subject.**

- 1) Please write a brief description of the distinguishing traits of theocentric preaching.**
  
- 2) What are the merits of theocentric preaching compared to anthropocentric practices?**
  
- 3) Which of the topics introduced was most valuable? difficult? unconvincing? useful?**
  
- 4) What is the best use of the Bible characters found in the preaching passage?**
  
- 5) How does theocentric preaching contribute to relevance in the sermon?**

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **GENERALIZATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

This project, due to its scope and size, has yielded many insights. All who have undertaken the writing of a thesis encounter the familiar, if formidable, factors of planning and perseverance. The awareness that wasn't anticipated, however, concerned the task of preaching itself. This major pastoral responsibility had early on earned the respect of this writer. But in the course of reviewing dozens of resources and considering the counsel of gifted and godly men, the role of preacher became larger than life. The collective wisdom of these theologians and homileticians served to set the bar at new heights. If ignorance is bliss, the increased exposure of this doctoral program has disturbed the equilibrium. No gain without pain, applies to preaching student/practioners, too. The results, however, have been much more rewarding than frustrating. This includes the personal satisfaction of achievement, but even more the enriching understanding that the Bible and preaching are to be viewed from a theocentric perspective.

#### **REPORT OF THESIS WRITING EXPERIENCE**

The initial selection of a subject for the thesis was not difficult. Reading assignments in preparation for the first year seminar included *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, by Greidanus. Within this text I was introduced to the term "theocentric" in relation to preaching. I felt nothing less than conviction that many sermons preached expressed an anthropocentric orientation. In their desire to be helpful and relevant many

have followed the pattern of deriving lessons from the lives of biblical characters. This has been done at the expense of authorial intention and God-centered interpretation.

Research has persuaded this writer that theocentric preaching is neither well understood, nor widely practiced. The support for theocentric preaching became even more convincing as I considered the organic and progressive nature of God's revelation. The coherence of Scripture is identified in the character of God and his consistently purposeful activity. His redemptive purposes are unfolded in history and this focus governed the material that was included in the Bible. Because the Scripture was given to God's people originally, it continually carries a kerygmatic message to its readers. This redeeming work is centered in Christ, therefore he is the center of Scripture. This thesis project has demonstrated the validity of the theocentric perspective.

The research and writing that established the biblical and theological foundation for preaching allowed this writer to set forth in articulate manner the convictions that support and shape his preaching. These values had been noted previously but had never been collected and recorded. This section of the thesis provided inspiration as it reflected the veracity of God's Word, the potency of His Spirit and the privilege of being his herald. The powerful, living Word is set loose when it is preached with biblical, doctrinal integrity. Reverence for Scripture was enriched as I understood it was filled with a theocentric or Christocentric purpose.

Although the term "theocentric" was originally encountered in the context of preaching, it was discovered that the term is used more widely and diversely. The focused literature review demonstrated that theocentric issues were important. The polemic nature

of "theocentric versus anthropocentric" interpretation is largely recognized. Surveying the breadth of usage created the need to distinguish the helpful from harmful ways the term "theocentric" was employed. This stage of research confirmed the credibility of the thesis problem statement, as it surfaced many authors who spoke directly to the matter of preaching from a God-centered perspective. The literature review experience proved educational as it required resourceful searching for books and articles that were pertinent to the topic. Advice from the reference librarian was also discovered to be very valuable. New frontiers were crossed in conducting computer searches for current literature. The subsequent stages of selecting and arranging so many resources proved to be a challenge that was worthwhile.

As a corollary concern to theocentrism relevance also became an area for research. Since many anthropocentric interpretations stem from the zeal to be relevant, it was deemed critical that relevance be understood in relation to theocentricity. It became convincingly apparent that theocentrism assures relevance. Because the original recipients of Scripture received a message relevant to them, it is guaranteed to contain a message, rightly interpreted, that is relevant for today. The subtle but significant distinction between a revelation that is historic or history was noted. God's Word is historically accurate, but it is more than a history book. It was proclamation then, and it is so now. This subject opened my eyes to a wider body of literature that is likewise concerned for relevance. In an experience not uncommon for researchers, this writer gathered more material on relevance than the focus of this thesis required. This too was a benefit of doing a wide review of the current literature.

In writing a large project such as this, one is faced with the necessities of discipline and organization. The newly acquired technique that plotted notecards onto a storyboard proved a useful way to manage an overwhelming amount of material. Selecting and ordering the vast array of resources was both daunting and energizing. What was once an unknown territory trod only by others has now become the familiar, and not so formidable ground of personal experience.

The focus of the third year seminar was on the discipline of teaching. Though this material would be applicable in any setting, the emphasis was on the teaching of preaching. The classroom training equipped this writer to better organize the teaching topic into useful incremental lessons that were in turn expressed with measurable objectives. This benefit was applied in the curriculum writing of chapter four and the practical teaching experience that is reviewed in the remainder of chapter five.

Such a project is not done alone, although this writer worked alone. My family gave up time and took up tasks while I was preoccupied. Pastoral and support staff and congregation were very supportive and understanding as I stepped away for a week here and there to concentrate on this thesis. Others have provided quiet places of retreat for the required hours of reading and writing. God has been doubly gracious, allowing me to enter this program and permitting me to see it to completion. His grace ennobled others as it enabled me. To God be the glory.

## REPORT OF CLASSROOM TEACHING EXPERIENCE

The third and final seminar on homiletics focused on the teaching of preaching. In application of the materials and fulfillment of the requirements of this doctoral program I was directed to engage in the teaching of homiletics. The course content and length were flexible, so long as real experience in teaching was gained. My initial effort to make the arrangements consisted of approaching the Academic Dean of *Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary* in Mill Valley, California. Although the school is over two hours away, its theological library was my primary research center. The dean recommended that I contact their homiletics professor to see if I could provide instruction for a class session. The limits of this opportunity inclined me to pursue other schools.

A local Assembly of God church offers an informal post-high school curriculum under the auspices of their *New Life Bible College*. I had noticed the year before *Biblical Preaching*, by Haddon Robinson was their text being sold at the Christian bookstore. I explained my assignment and training to the director and offered to present or assist with this homiletics course. I was told this course was not being offered again this year.

My next attempt was prompted by a mailing which alerted me to an extension class being offered in my community by *Shasta Bible College* of Redding, California. Again I contacted the school and explained my situation. The school president invited me to submit a faculty application along with information on my philosophy of education and biography of Christian experience. The process was beneficial, but no teaching positions were available.

My prayer for a helpful and viable teaching opportunity was answered within my own congregation. A missionary candidate earning his degree in Bible by correspondence from *Southeastern Bible College* informed me of his upcoming Homiletics course. The syllabus indicated that Haddon Robinson's book was one of the texts. The Dean granted permission for this student to substitute their curriculum with the one I had proposed. The course description proposal is found on page 114. I then sent a letter to 30 community pastors inviting them participate in the class. One responded and was joined by my two associates. The four students met for the first time on October 3, 1996.

The teaching experience that followed was not related to my thesis topic, but a basic homiletics course. The benefits of this arrangement included: (1) being able to teach over several sessions which yielded a wider variety of experience; (2) developing all the basic elements of preaching, not merely supplementing someone else's class; and (3) providing material that the students had not previously received in their formal education.

In developing the curriculum I arranged for 13 sessions. We met on Thursday mornings from 9:30 -11:00 am. The textbook assigned to all was Haddon Robinson's, *Biblical Preaching*. The course progressed by considering the 10 stages of sermon development. After stage six students were given opportunity for feedback. The final feedback session was the experience of preaching sermons which had been developed during the course.

The class schedule with assignments and topics can be found on page 115. It was helpful to follow the structure used in our third year seminar at which peers each taught a segment of the homiletics course. My resources included student handouts, Donald

Sunukjian's notes and Haddon Robinson's book. Each week students were provided with structured exercises which encouraged their interaction by filling in answers and adding notes. This device served two purposes. As the teacher, I used it as an outline and material to guide my lesson plan. For the student it preserved the most important concepts of the class for review. No formal tests were given.

In order to maximize the "lessons" I was learning as a teacher I kept a journal of impressions and intentions. The following summary is gleaned from these entries. Before the first class I felt an uneasiness over how best to mete out material to fill each session and cover all subjects. A sense of ambivalence corresponded to the particular subject matter. If I teach any other material, only my teaching technique is exposed. But to teach preaching presupposes one is a good preacher. I was uncomfortable with that conclusion. In the initial session my fears were realized; I was underprepared. The 90 minute class exceeded my material and I added unplanned and haphazard information. The sting of this experience convinced me to use handouts and follow a much more methodical approach.

In the selection of biblical passages to study and preach I explained the literary genre of the Bible and encouraged students to make selections so each genre would be represented. The stage that introduced the exegetical idea was most challenging to teach. As teacher I found myself stretched to manage the many different and occasionally inadequate ideas that were offered. This proved to be more art than science.

Under the topic of developmental questions we discussed the move from "then to now". This created an opportunity to present what I had been learning in my thesis work on the subject of relevance. When the stages advanced to purpose it was recognized that

this element connects the text to the congregation. After the lesson on outlining and transitions I perceived that the material had remained too abstract. This realization had implications for other sessions, revealing the need to illustrate and provide plentiful examples of the matter under discussion.

The session designated for feedback produced another insight. It is easier for the student to receive information. It is more difficult to implement the information. Some students felt ill-prepared for sharing the development of their passages. In smaller groups it would be beneficial to check the development every other session and interact more openly throughout the course. Everyone seemed more comfortable when the lectures resumed. It is obvious that while lectures are effective at imparting information, they do not insure integration of information with practice.

During the last instructional session I distributed a course evaluation. The six questions prompted useful responses. Each student felt the class met their expectations, especially if they participated fully. All expressed greater confidence in the task of preaching, particularly in the preparation of sermons. The most difficult stages were considered to be the exegetical and homiletical ideas. These merit extra attention and preparation. Most useful segments were the developmental questions and purpose. One noted the course benefits would increase if more time were allowed to implement the concepts. All agreed that practice was needed next to test understanding and proficiency.

In summary, the teaching assignment was a demanding yet worthwhile exercise. The perception of classroom instruction dynamics by the student is certainly one-sided. It was in the responsible role of teacher that I discovered the rigors of incremental and

sequential lesson plans. My students were motivated and supportive. This task would be far more difficult when learners are disinterested. Prior to this experience I had coached two men, one-on-one, who were preparing specific sermons. In both cases I found it very rewarding to interact over the text as we discovered its meaning and discussed effective ways to present it. The more formal role of teacher was stimulating if at times intimidating. Nevertheless, I grew by the experience and hope I will be able to serve the Kingdom in this capacity again.

## CONCLUSION

The generalizations and conclusions noted above were neither hasty nor "jumped to". The thesis has spread across several months. That span of time encompassed both highlights like exciting discoveries and lowlights such as computer crashes. Nevertheless, the effort was regarded as worthwhile. This estimate will only increase if the material contained here will be of benefit by encouraging other preachers to be theocentric as well.

"The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride."  
Ecclesiastes 7:8.

# **PA 213 - HOMILETICS**

## **DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF BIBLICAL SERMONS**

---

### **INSTRUCTIONAL GOAL:**

The student will demonstrate skill in discovering and developing the central idea into a coherent biblical sermon by creating two manuscripted sermons to be presented orally.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

These measurable outcomes will be specific to each session. For example: "The student will identify the exegetical idea from sample passages".

### **PROCEDURES:**

The class will meet once a week on Thursday mornings for 90 minutes to present material, allowing for group discussion and interaction. Two sermons will be presented to the class. (In event that a sermon could be preached before the congregation, it will be preferred and meet the same requirement.) The total number of sessions projected will be 13.

### **CONCEPTS:**

Ten stages of sermon development will be progressively introduced to the students:

- |                                  |                                      |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1) Selection of passage          | 6) Determine purpose                 |
| 2) Study passage                 | 7) Create outline                    |
| 3) Discover exegetical idea      | 8) Gather supporting material        |
| 4) Apply developmental questions | 9) Prepare introduction & conclusion |
| 5) Formulate homiletical idea    | 10) Write manuscript                 |

### **RESOURCES:**

Two textbooks will be assigned:

**Biblical Preaching** by Haddon Robinson (read in conjunction with lessons)

**Biblical Preaching for Today's World** by Lloyd Perry (read independent of lessons)

<b>DATE</b>	<b>ASSIGNMENT</b>	<b>TOPIC</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
<b>OCT 3</b>	<b>Biblical Preaching chapter 1</b>	<b>Introduction to Expository Preaching</b>	
<b>OCT 10</b>	<b>BP - pp 51-66</b>	<b>Stage 1 - Select Passage Stage 2 - Study Passage</b>	
<b>OCT 17</b>	<b>BP - chapter 2 &amp; BP - pp 66-75</b>	<b>Stage 3 - Exegetical Idea</b>	
<b>OCT 24</b>	<b>BP - pp 77-96</b>	<b>Stage 4 - Developmental Questions</b>	
<b>NOV 14</b>	<b>BP - pp 97-104</b>	<b>Stage 5 - Homiletical Idea</b>	
<b>NOV 21</b>	<b>BP - chapter 5 &amp; BP - pp 115-127</b>	<b>Stage 6 - Purpose</b>	
<b>DEC 5</b>	<b>BP - pp 128-134</b>	<b>Stage 7 - Outline</b>	
<b>DEC 19</b>	<b>Prepare to Preach</b>	<b>Class Presentations -- Stages 1-7 Development</b>	
<b>JAN 9</b>	<b>BP - chapter 7</b>	<b>Stage 8 - Supporting Material</b>	
<b>JAN 16</b>	<b>BP - chapter 8</b>	<b>Stage 9 - Introduction &amp; Conclusion</b>	
<b>JAN 23</b>	<b>BP - chapters 9-10</b>	<b>Stage 10 - Writing &amp; Delivery Style</b>	
<b>JAN 30</b>	<b>Prepare to Preach</b>	<b>Class Presentations -- Finished Sermon</b>	
<b>FEB 6</b>	<b>Prepare to Preach</b>	<b>Class Presentations -- Finished Sermon</b>	

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

(Containing books, articles and other resources)

Adams, Jay E. *Preaching With Purpose: The Urgent Task of Homiletics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990.

Allen, Ronald J. *Contemporary Biblical Interpretation for Preaching*. Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1984.

Armstrong, John H., ed. "Preaching - God's Way to Reformation and Revival." *Reformation & Revival Journal*. 1 (Fall 1992): 9-18.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*. Chicago: Moody, 1996

Bailey, Raymond. "Preaching in the Electronic Village." *Review and Expositor*. 90 (1993): 351-357.

Bailey, Raymond, ed. *Hermeneutics for Preaching: Approaches to Contemporary Interpretations of Scripture*. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.

Barlow, William. "Communicating the Gospel." *Searching Together*. 21 (1993): 45-61.

Barr, Browne. "Name Tags and the Theocentric Focus." *The Christian Century*. 26 (November 1980), 1158-1161.

Blanchard, John. "Evangelistic Preaching for Today." *Reformation and Revival Journal*. 2 (1993): 13-28.

Bridges, Jerry. *Transforming Grace: Living Confidently in God's Unfailing Love*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1991.

Brown, Colin. "New Horizons in Hermeneutics: Book Review." *Calvin Theological Journal*. 30 (April 1995): 232-237.

Brueggemann, Walter. "Preaching as Reimagination." *Theology Today*. 52 (1995): 313-329.

Buttrick, David G. *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Preaching in America, 1989." *Concordial Journal*. 16 (1990): 90-98.

- Buzzell, Sid. "Learning and Instructional Design." unpublished paper provided to Doctor of Ministry seminar. (1996): 1-16.
- Carson, D. A. *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Primacy of Expository Preaching: Priorities and Pitfalls*. Minneapolis: Desiring God, 1995. Sound recording: three cassette album.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Clapp, Rodney. "Why the Devil Takes Visa." *Christianity Today*. 40 (20 October 1996): 18-33.
- Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994.
- Clowney, Edmund P. *Preaching and Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Church: Contours of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.
- Davis, Henry Grady. *Design for Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958.
- Dennison, James T. "Building the Biblical-Theological Sermon. Part II: Text and Context." *Kerux*. 5 (1990): 32-46.
- Dick, Walter and Lou Carey. *The Systematic Design of Instruction*. 3d ed. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990.
- Dorman, Ted M. *A Faith for All Seasons: Historic Christian Belief in Its Classical Expression*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995.
- Dreyer, T. F. J. "The Kerygmatic Structure as Method in Eliminating Moralism in Preaching." *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*. Afrikaans. 50 (1994): 281-295. Cited in Religious and Theological Abstracts.
- Duduit, Michael, ed. *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*. Nashville: Broadman, 1992.
- Edwards, Jonathan. *The Religious Affections*. Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961.

- Fee, Gordon D. *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983.
- Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993.
- Fickenscher, Carl C. "The Contribution of the Reformation to Preaching." *Concordia Theological Quarterly*. 58 (1994): 255-282.
- Foster, Richard J. and James Bryan Smith, eds. *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups*. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1990.
- Fowler, John W. "Preaching Christ." *Ministry*. 70 (January 1997): 21-22,26.
- George, Timothy. *Theology of the Reformers*. Nashville: Broadman, 1988.
- Gnuse, Robert. *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation and the Canon of Scripture*. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.
- Green, Michael. "Effective Preaching." *Asbury Seminary*. 39 (1984): 3-15.
- Greidanus, Sidney. *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts*. Toronto: Wedge, 1970.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preaching and the New Literary Studies of the Bible." *Calvin Theological Journal*. 28 (1993): 121-130.
- Guinness, Os and John Seel, eds. *No God But God: Breaking with the Idols of Our Age*. Chicago: Moody, 1992.
- Gustafson, James M. *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective*, Vol. 1, Theology and Ethics. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "A Theocentric Interpretation of Life." *The Christian Century*. 30 July - 6 August 1980, 754-760.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. "Preaching As Though We Had Enemies." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life*. 53 (May 1995): 45-49.
- Hinlicky, Paul R. "Theocentrism." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. 26 (Fall 1987): 258-263.

- Hunter, James Davison. *American Evangelicalism: Conservative Religion and the Quandary of Modernity*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1983.
- Jensen, Robert A. "Speaking for God...Speaking for Others." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*. 34 (1995): 167-172
- Jones, Stuart R. "Balaam, The Magi and Herod: A Study of Continuity in God's Revelation and Redemptive-Historical Preaching." *Kerux*. 10 (1995): 3-9.
- Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981.
- \_\_\_\_\_. and Moises Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.
- Klein, William W., Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., Craig L. Blomberg; consulting editor Kermit A. Ecklebarger. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*. Dallas: Word, 1993
- Knitter, Paul F. "Theocentric Christology." *Theology Today*. 40 (July 1983): 130-149.
- Knowles, Malcom S. *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 3d ed. Houston: Gulf, 1984.
- Krieg, Gustav A. "The Old Text - The New Message. Homiletical Theory and Popular Ecclesiastical Reality." *Theologische Literaturzeitung*. German. 119 (1994): 195-210. Cited in Religious and Theological Abstracts.
- Large, James. *Two Hundred and Eighty Titles and Symbols of Christ*. Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994. Originally published by Hodder & Stoughton in 1888.
- Larsen, David L. *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989.
- Leith, John H. "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in Light of Recent Research." *Review and Expositor*. 86 (Winter 1989): 29-44.
- Linzey, Andrew "Is Anthropocentrism Christian?" *Theology*. 84 (January 1981): 17-21.
- Litfin, Duane. *Public Speaking: A Handbook for Christians*. 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992.
- Lloyd-Jones, D. Martyn. *Preaching and Preachers*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971.

Logan, Samuel T., Jr. "The Hermeneutics of Jonathan Edwards." *The Westminster Theological Journal*. 43 (Fall 1980): 79-96.

\_\_\_\_\_, ed. *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*. Phillipsburg, NJ. Presbyterian and Reformed. 1986

Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Preaching." *Interpretation*. 44 (1990): 341-352.

MacArthur, John, Jr., ed. *Rediscovering Expository Preaching: Balancing the Science and Art of Biblical Exposition*. Dallas. Word. 1992

Mager, Robert F. *Preparing Instructional Objectives*, Rev. 2d ed. Belmont, CA: Lake. 1984.

Maier, Gerhard. *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*. translated by Edwind W. Leverenz and Rudolph F. Norden. St. Louis: Concordia, 1974.

Massey, James Earl. "Hermeneutics for Preaching." *Review and Expositor*. 90 (1993): 359-369.

Mayhue, Richard L. "Rediscovering Expository Preaching." *Master's Seminary Journal*. 1 (1990): 109-127.

McClymand, Michael J. "Towards an Understanding of Jonathan Edwards' Theocentric Metaphysics." *Scottish Journal of Theology*. 47 (1994): 43-59.

McCullough, Donald W. *The Trivialization of God: The Dangerous Illusion of a Manageable Diety*. Colorado Springs. Nav Press. 1995.

McKim, Donald K. ed. *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

McKim, Donald K. *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preacher Use Scripture*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1994.

Meeter, H. Henry. *The Basic Ideas fo Calvinism*. 6th ed. revised by Paul A. Marshall. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990.

Miller, Calvin. *The Empowered Communicator: Keys to Unlocking an Audience*. Nashville: Broadman, 1994.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Putting the Promise in Your Preaching." *Preaching* 10 (July - August 1994): 2-13.
- Miller, Patrick D. "A Theocentric Theologian of Hope." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin: New Series*. 16 (1995): 22-35.
- Mohler, R. Albert, Jr. "A Bee-line to the Cross: The Preaching fo Charles Haddon Spurgeon." *Preaching*. 8 (November - December 1992): 28-30.
- Morgan, Robert. "Scrutiny of Interpretations." *The Expository Times*. 104 (March 1993): 186-187.
- Myers, Ruth. *31 Days of Praise*. Singapore. Navigators. 1992.
- Obaje, Yusufu Ameh. "Is Ecclesiology Solely Christocentric, Pneumatocentric or Theocentric?" *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*. 2 (December 1987): 4-10.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Theocentric Christology as a Basis for a More Relevant Doctrine of Christ for the African Christian." *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology*. 5 (December 1990): 1-7.
- Ortlund, Raymond C., Jr. *A Passion for God: Prayers and Meditations on the Book of Romans*. Wheaton: Crossway, 1994.
- Osborne, Grant R. *The Hermeneutical Spiral*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1991.
- Pelton, Randy. "Questionnaire for Pastors." unpublished research for Doctor of Ministry seminar at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. (1994): 1-7.
- Phelps, Dennis L. "What Happened to Homiletics?" *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*. 2 ( 1993): 15-28.
- Piper, John. *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*. Portland: Multnomah, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids. Baker. 1990.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Preaching as Worship: Meditations of Expository Exultation." Three manuscripts from "The Rom Lectures" at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, November 1993.
- Pitt-Watson, Ian. *Preaching: A Kind of Folly*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Primer for Preachers*. Grand Rapids. Baker. 1986.

*Religious and Theological Abstracts*. Volumes 34-38. Myerstown, PA: Religious and Theological Abstracts, Inc. 34-39 (1991-1994).

Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids. Baker. 1980.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Preaching to Everyone in Particular." *Leadership*. 15 (1994): 99-103.

Roof, Wade Clark. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993..

Rowell, Ed. "Where Preaching is Headed." *Leadership*. 18 (Winter 1997): 95-98.

Ryrie, Charles Caldwell. *Dispensationalism Today*. Chicago: Moody, 1965.

Rossi, Vincent. "Christian Ecology: A Theocentric Practice." *Epiphany Journal*. 8 (Fall 1987): 8-13.

Sager, Allan H. "Preaching and Hermeneutics." *Trinity Seminary Bulletin*. 2 (September 1980): 19-28.

Schaibley, Robert W. "Proclamation, Not Communication." *Concordia Journal*. 18 (1992): 6-27.

Schulze, L. F. "Anthropocentric Preaching." *In Die Skriflig*. Afrikaans. 28 (1994): 353-370. Cited in Religious and Theological Abstracts.

Schweiker, William. "Theocentric Ethics: God Will Be God." *The Christian Century*. 15 (January 1986), 36-38.

Shaw, Wayne. "Rediscovering Our Message." *Preaching*. 11 (1995): 3-18.

Sleeth, Ronald E. "Theology of the Word." *Reformed Liturgy and Music Journal*. 17 (Winter 1983): 8-10.

Smith, Donald K. *Creating Understanding: A Handbook for Christian Communication Across Cultural Landscapes*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Smith, James K. S. "Theological Preaching: Congregational Repellent?" *Emmaeus Journal*. 2 (1993): 193-205.

Sproul, R. C. "Theology and Preaching in the 90's." interview with Michael Duduit. *Preaching*. 9 (March-April 1995): 19-23.

Stott, John R. W. *Guard The Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1970.

- \_\_\_\_\_. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Communication, Context, and the Centrality of Jesus Christ." *Japan Christian Quarterly*. 51 (Summer 1985): 154-158.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God's Word to Today's World*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Relevant Biblical Preaching: The Art of Double Listening," interview by Derek Morris. *Ministry*. 70 (January 1997): 8-10.
- Stuart, Douglas. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors*. 2d ed. revised and enlarged. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984.
- Thiselton, Anthony C. *The Two Horizons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.
- Trotter, J. Irwin. "Our Theologies of Preaching." *Quarterly Review: A Journal of Theological Resource for Ministry*. 15 (Fall 1995): 237-249.
- Tuck, William P. "Toward a Theology of the Proclaimed Word." *Review and Expositor*. 81 (Spring 1984): 291-305.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 6th ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
- Velema, W. H. "Preaching and the Psalms." *Reformed Theological Review*. 553 (1994): 63-72.
- Vorster, J. M. "Renewal in Preaching in View of the Trends in Contemporary Philosophies of Life?" *In Die Skriflig*. Afrikaans. 29 (1995): 443-466. Cited in Religious and Theological Abstracts.
- Warren, Timothy S. "A Paradigm for Preaching." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 148 (1991): 463-486.
- Wells, David F. *No Place for Truth, or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans. 1993.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

White, R. E. O. *A Guide to Preaching: A Practical Primer of Homiletics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973.

Willhite, Keith. "Audience Relevance in Expository Preaching." *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 149 (1992): 355-369.

Willimon, William. "Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?" *The Christian Century*. 28 (February 1990), 204-206.

## **VITA**

**James Merrill Anderson was born on June 5, 1950, in Rockford, Illinois. Following graduation from Guilford High School in 1968, also in Rockford, he attended Trinity College in Deerfield, Illinois. In May 1973, he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in Psychology. After a one year internship in his home church, the First Evangelical Free Church of Rockford, Illinois, he enrolled in Trinity Evangelical Divinity School of Deerfield, Illinois. During this time he married Laura Jane West in 1974. He graduated from seminary in June 1977, with the Master of Divinity degree.**

**Upon graduation James and Laura studied at the Institute for Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem, Israel. In July 1977, he assumed his first pastorate, the Evangelical Free Church in Madrid, Iowa, where he served through November 1984. Beginning in December 1984, he became the Senior Pastor of the Evangelical Free Church of Yuba City, California. He continues to serve this congregation at the present.**

**In January 1994, James entered the Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary located in Charlotte, North Carolina. His graduation from this Specialist Track in Homiletics is set for May 1997.**

## **ABSTRACT**

**This thesis seeks to demonstrate that theocentric preaching is a needed and valid approach to the preparation and presentation of biblical sermons. It is understood that the Bible is God's reliable and understandable revelation of himself and his saving activity. Because God is at the center of the Scriptures, he is to be at the center of the sermon.**

**God's Word, therefore, is not to be preached in an anthropocentric manner that features the biblical characters as examples, good or bad. To do so is to misjudge the very nature of Scripture which is given to show God's purposes which are revealed in his relationship with his creation.**

**Theocentric is seen to be fully compatible with Christocentric. Because Christ is God, he too is at the center of revelation and his redemptive work is the key interpretive tool for understanding the original author's intent. Study of the text is to employ theological as well as historical and grammatical tools, although theocentric sermons are not theology lectures. Seeing the sermon text in the larger context of book and canon allows the preacher to avoid atomistic misinterpretations. Theocentric preaching is relevant because it proclaims a message that was relevant when originally delivered. The task of the preacher is not to make a passage relevant, but to discover its relevance for his hearers. Theocentrism is a hermeneutic and homiletic perspective that does justice to the Word and gives glory to God.**